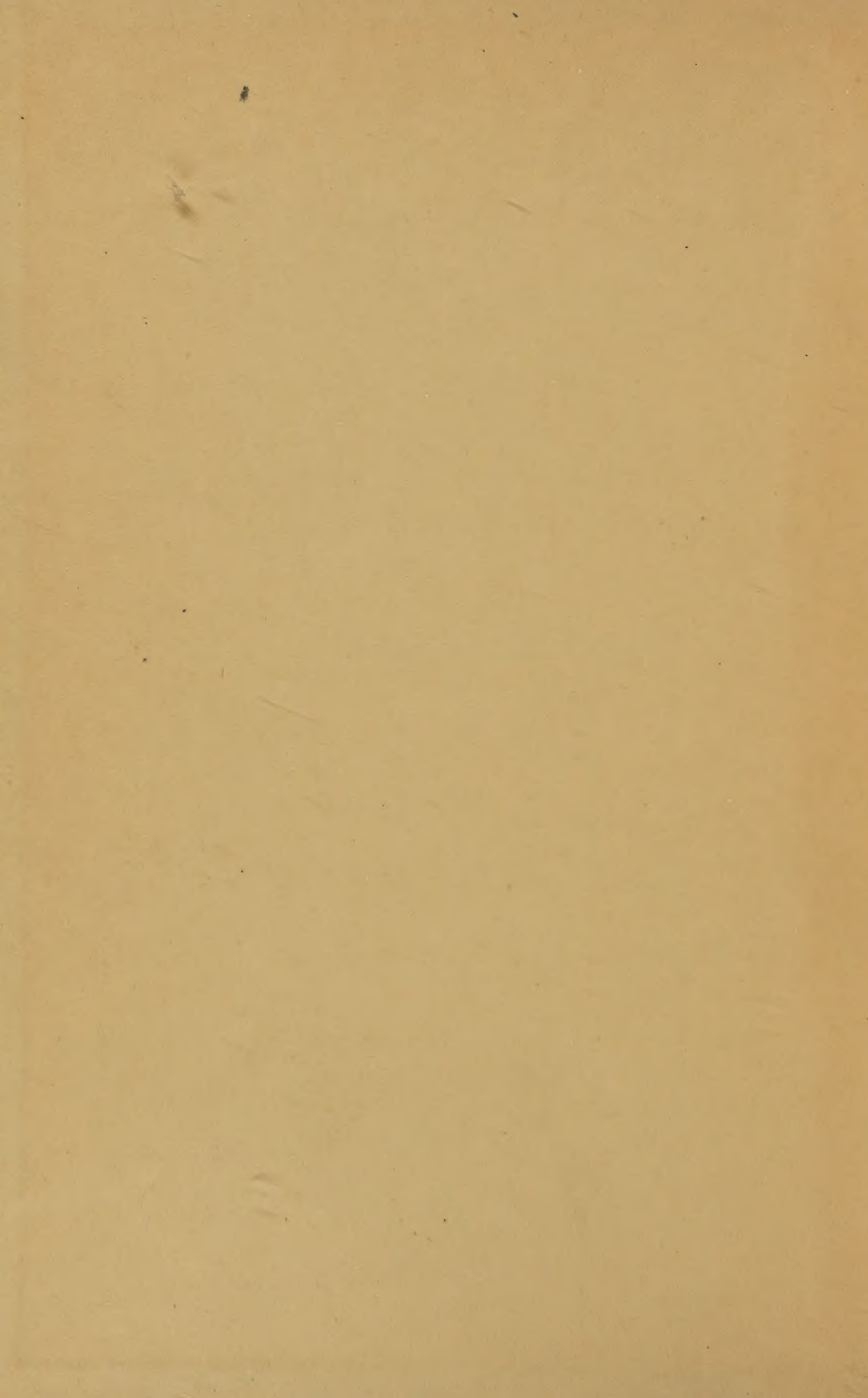


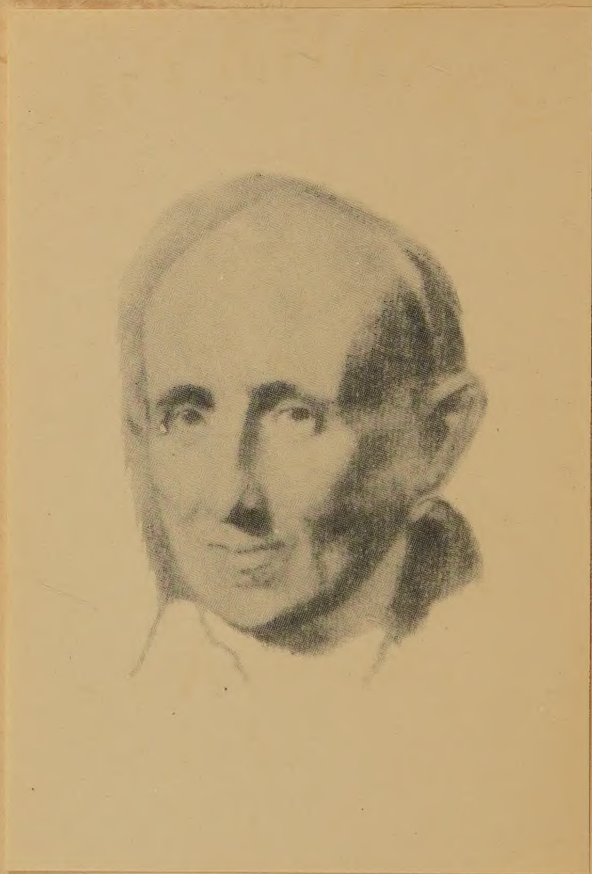
NAVIGATOR

ALFRED STANFORD





NAVIGATOR



NATHANIEL BOWDITCH

Salem Navigator—1773-1835

(After the Portrait by Gilbert Stuart)

NAVIGATOR



*The Story of
Nathaniel Bowditch*

By
ALFRED STANFORD



1927

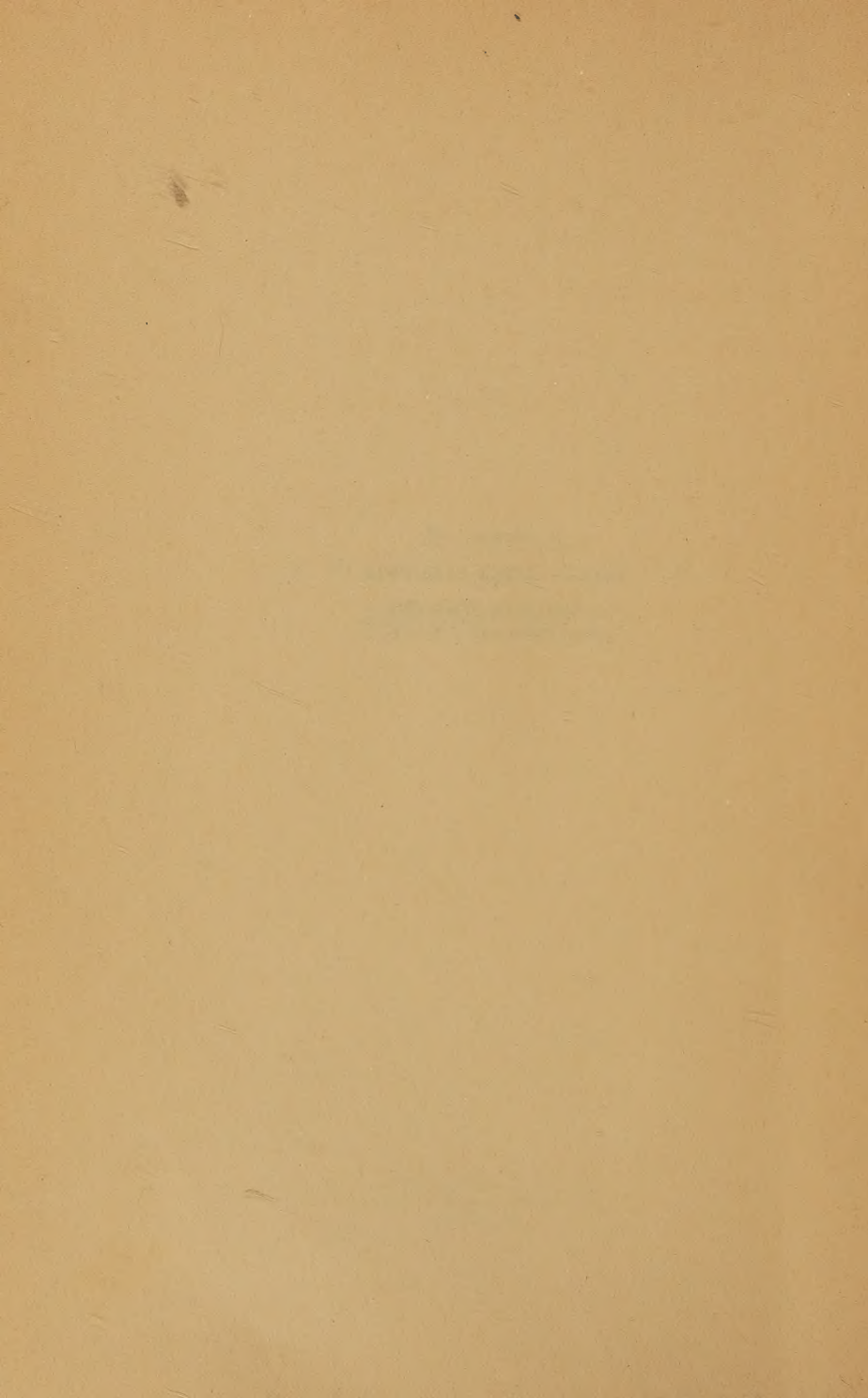
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In Memory of
PHILIP EDER MADURO
*whose great friendship
forwarded this writing.*



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The title page decoration is from an old print of the *Putnam* on her beam ends off the coast. It was on the *Putnam* that Nathaniel Bowditch made his last voyage.

Introducing N. Bowditch of Salem

BECAUSE what follows is vignetted upon the more romantic episodes of Bowditch's life, and because early American history has chosen other preoccupations, it is necessary to introduce you to a stranger.

A biography of fact would make a book far short of adequacy—under an onslaught of fact this unique soul would still keep the distant reserve of a stranger. But in the swing of a story, the facts about Bowditch have a glamor—not only the glamor of rare things—difficult to find, but they share the glamor of a great soul that had, as the French put it, *une idée fixe*—the “fixed idea” that now and again grips a man and makes within him a mystery, so that we are apt to call him a “great man.” Freedom made of Lincoln a “great man”; argument of Socrates.

A man with a fixed idea is touched with something that makes him boundless, impossible to spot and pin down, but infinitely alluring to survey and explore. It may be even a very simple idea fixed in a man that excites in us the thrill of pioneering and adventure.

In Bowditch the idea was comparatively simple. What it made of him was an image of everlasting fascination, an image like a gem held in the hand and slowly turned that renews its fire as each new facet discovers new light. Conrad's phrase about Lord Jim keeps coming to mind—“For me that white figure in

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the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma."

The simplest fact of all about Nathaniel Bowditch is the result, in modern times, of his "fixed idea."

His time was remote—he was born in 1773—and yet this result of his idea is still alive.

His book of some 700 pages is before me now. At present it is published under the authority of the Navy Department by the Bureau of Navigation, and is the standard text of navigation at sea and in the air. Tracing through many editions, backward into the time its author lived, shows the *Navigator* the survival of many vicissitudes; but here it stands now, essentially the concept and plan of its author, and carrying his name.

To any of the sea-faring fraternity, introduction to this first fact is presumptuous, for Bowditch is almost the first word the navigator learns. Along with his first star sight, "Bowditch" swiftly becomes a part of his every day vocabulary. While the official title remains in its original form, *The American Practical Navigator*, on the bridge and in the chart room the heavy ocher volume passes as just "Bowditch."

Until Bowditch, ships found their way across ocean tracks with no exact calculation of their courses. Bowditch made it possible for them to sail in as nearly a straight line as weather would permit by the first workable system of navigation. It was his concept that gave American ships their fleetness, and it was the fleetness of American ships that so largely formed a country for so many years dependent on its maritime trade. The straight line has always been the shortest distance, hence the quickest course between two points. His simple achievement had far-reaching results that laid

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the foundation for the golden age of the clipper ship that was to follow.

But this is enough, for Salem of 1773 is waiting, its roofs and old houses almost as old as they seem now. There is a smell of new cut wood in the shipyards, and high bowsprits project at intervals almost over Derby Street.

I

HABAKKUK AND MARY

Chapter One

I

AS twilight deepened into night on March 26, 1773, the wind roared in from the ocean over Salem. With redoubled force under the cover of darkness, this wind, wild and spume-laden, rushed in past Baker's Island and Naugus Head. It tore at the brailed up rigging of vessels moored along the half-mile water-front. Down through that forest of spars it whirled, dark, mysterious, vengeful. Down on the long roofs of the wharves, past the counting-houses, snatching at the gambrel-roofed homes of wealthy merchants that lined the other side of the water-front street. Farther up from the harbor the elms tossed and flung their twisting branches against low-driven clouds. Rain, driven by this untamed wind, swept Salem's winding streets. Through it all, mingled the reek of salt, the sound of surf, as the rising howl of the wind assailed the tight-shut doors, and rattled the windows in their frames. Under the power of the wind, the salt water that nearly surrounded Salem had taken possession of the little town.

Crowded behind the merchant mansions of Derby Street, the smaller houses that reached up into the town seemed seeking shelter—houses with overhanging stories, houses huddled together, that had the look of ages in their weather-blackened, hand-rifted clap-boards. Gusts of wind drove spray and rain over these

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old houses. Up from the water the gusts swept to where the peaked roofs of dwellings were more scattered.

In a mean house at the end of Brown Street the gale found less resistance. Here, where the small window-panes had broken, poorly constructed patches of paper and boards could not keep the wild night out. In this house, her lips kept tight shut except when breathing made them open, Mary Bowditch waited to give her fourth child to the world.

Habakkuk Bowditch, her husband, was at sea. Yet here was not the completely romantic picture of the wife facing childbirth while her husband followed his gallant calling facing the sea. Mary Bowditch had married a very convincing ship's officer in Habakkuk, only to find that the marriage state made him better appreciate the comforts of land. He would go to sea only when she became pregnant; these departures being caused less by a desire to earn a few hundred dollars to lighten the hardship of their lives than by Habakkuk's conviction that birth and its confusions were better endured at a distance.

Old Dame Bowditch, Habakkuk's mother, stood by Mary's bed and complained of the cold. Although she had come from Cousin Jonathan Ingersoll's farm out in Danvers especially to be present at this event, she was voluble in her protestations of reluctance.

The old woman rubbed her enlarged knuckles as if to drive warmth into their bones from the withered palm of her other hand. That hand had sent the two oldest children, clad in ragged clothes, out into the gale to fetch Dr. Holyoke. In this weather Dame Bowditch guessed that the good doctor would be at the Derby

Habakkuk and Mary

mansion tending Richard Derby's gouty knee. With an old woman's shrewdness, she had called after the departing children to tell Richard's son Elias to come if Dr. Holyoke should not be there. Elias had several times done kind things for Mary Bowditch. If he saw the poverty and suffering now in this house, he might be stirred to a new generosity. Secretly, Dame Bowditch hoped the excitement would be over before Dr. Holyoke arrived.

"In my time," she wheezed, "we didn't have to get doctors." She mumbled on: "Like as not old Holyoke won't stir from Mr. Richard a wet night like this. It would be a mercy that would carry Richard Derby off. Sinful the way he is, with so many ships, so many dollars. Oh, he'll sizzle. Yes, when he goes, Richard Derby will sizzle on the coals of Beelzebub, that he will. And my Habakkuk, your man, he'll be in hell's fires, too. When the time comes for Habakkuk to roast, it'll be Thanksgiving Day itself for the Old Nick!"

Mary Bowditch did not speak.

Dame Bowditch continued her chant—talking about Habakkuk. Just as her excitement over the coming birth was without reference to any persons or affections, so she talked now, as weird, as impersonal as the wind without; not to the suffering woman by her side, but past her, even past the cracked wall on the other side of the bed. In between the lath her voice seemed to reach, and the rattle in her throat was like the scrambling of mice dislodging plaster in the night.

Mary Bowditch waited for the doctor with dull, staring eyes that twitched shut for minutes, then twitched open to stare again. The withered dame

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crooned on with her lamentations. It sounded to Mary, when she was aware of it at all, like some one reading the Old Testament.

"Where's your man Habakkuk, I'd like to know? Leaving an old woman to do his work! He's anywhere but where he's of use, that Habakkuk!"

Mary suddenly closed her eyes, and raised her hand to her mouth.

"Now there, dearie, it ain't no bear that's got you. Just slack up a bit. Three times I've seen you through. This time won't be worse. 'Increase and multiply,' saith the Lord. Sounds like a man, don't it now? Take it easy. Meaning no disrespect to the Gospel, but what's for you to live on? Hab can't get himself a decent berth aboard any ship out of Salem. There isn't any one who doesn't know he needs one. I often wonder why he don't go back to the cooper's trade."

Mary stirred, asking faintly what day it was.

"The twenty-sixth. What will you call the brat when you get him? Certain to be a boy this time. First Mary, then Hab, then Elizabeth. The next a boy. I can't hear you. What! for my Nat? My husband? No, no! Nathaniel Bowditch was a scamp. Ain't right you should call him that. Married me, a Turner, and left me poor in my old age. So I have to live on what Jonathan Ingersoll can spare. But for the Lord's mercy I'd be dead."

The old woman paused to catch a question from Mary's lips.

"Noise?" she answered, "I don't hear no noise. Noise—what do you mean? It's only the wind creaking the dead branches in the trees. Always in March nights it gets me to thinking I'm going to die because

Habakkuk and Mary

of that. Sounds like I feel when I walk. It's a terrible wind from the bay that's in them trees— Hush! hush, Mary—”

II

Life in Salem rested on the wealth of the few who owned ships. Richard Derby owned ships. When he passed in the street, the taps of his heavy cane counted the number he owned. The water-front street, lined on the shore side with wharves and warehouses and chandleries, and on the other with the homes of ship-owners, was called Derby Street.

It was to the home of Richard Derby on Derby Street that Mary and Hab Bowditch went in search of help. Dr. Holyoke was there; but Richard Derby sent out word by his negro servant that the doctor could not be spared. Daunted, bewildered, the children were about to leave, when Elias Derby heard them in the hall. He got into his greatcoat to go with them before he suspected the probable nature of Mary Bowditch's illness.

It would not do to send the children back alone. Elias stroked his chin thoughtfully. “We had better stop at the Reverend Mr. Barnard's house, and ask him to come,” he said, remembering that the minister had some medical learning. “He may be able to help.” He thought grimly that there might be need of the Reverend Mr. Barnard's ministerial offices as well.

As the children huddled in the rain before the wide front door, he opened up his greatcoat and wrapped it around them.

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III

It was late that night that Nathaniel Bowditch was washed and set aside, and Mr. Barnard turned back to encourage the mother. Elias Derby broke up several chairs and a table to make a blaze in the fireplace. The fire slowly warmed the room, and covered its bitter aspect with soft illusory shadows. Nathaniel gave a short cry, and Mary Bowditch turned her face toward her son.

IV

Habakkuk returned late that spring; and from the meager earnings of his voyage, Mary Bowditch managed to save out enough money to buy food for herself and the children.

To keep clothes on the children, food in their stomachs, and the love of God in their hearts—this was the ceaseless task of their mother. At least once a week they must be immaculate for church, with their clothes mended and new ones stitched. The sprouting legs and arms of her family gave Mary Bowditch little rest from the needle.

The months glided on through another winter, into summer, and Nat was able to walk.

Mary Bowditch was not a strong woman, and at times her cares reduced even the buoyancy of her Christian fortitude. Physically she was usually exhausted from cleaning and washing and ironing and undernourishment. The trifling drafts on her hoard for each day's insufficient food left that much less for the next.

In the spring following Nat's birth, Habakkuk left

Habakkuk and Mary

his family for Boston to seek his fortunes in the shipping of that port. Mary heard from him at irregular intervals, but with no definite word of success, and if sometimes with a little money—never enough. He blamed his misfortunes entirely on the Colonists, who were making trouble with England and cutting the throat of their own trade.

Mary tried to be hopeful for the future, but as fall approached, and Habakkuk did not, her present difficulties reached a crisis.

To whom could she turn?

Her brother Jonathan Ingersoll might again take her family in with his. But between Jonathan and Habakkuk was constant disagreement that led to quarreling. Industrious, and moderately prosperous from alternate periods of farming and sea-faring, Jonathan was self-righteous. His small head that tapered up into a cone was outbalanced by long thick lips and a square protruding jaw. That face accurately reflected his nature. To go to him with her troubles would only inflame him the more against Habakkuk—not permanently solve her problem.

September came, and Mary Bowditch, hunger-driven, went to Danvers.

No children had come to Jonathan Ingersoll; and this deprivation now softened him toward his sister, so overly blessed. He received Mary kindly and offered to buy a small house for her near the cross-roads, just beyond the Derby farm, if she would consent to bring her family out of Salem, and if Habakkuk would make one genuine attempt to provide for his family by work ashore.

Mary tried vainly for several weeks to bring herself

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to accept her brother's offer. The house near the cross-roads was pitifully small. In the front it had but one window and a door. Inside were two floors. Each floor was a room and had a side window. The thought of her active household crowded into two rooms seemed impossible. While Mary hesitated, Habakkuk suddenly arrived.

Even more surprising than his arrival was his affluence. He had been successful in Boston. He had made a connection with several insurance companies, and need no longer look about for a ship. They could forget hard times.

Mary, who had a clear head for figures, could not quite see where the large volume of profit came in; but the thought of crisp roasts made her too dizzy with prospective well-being to question Habakkuk's glowing confidence.

After Mary had put the children in their bed, Habakkuk exuded his good fortune.

"Mary," he said, "this is the way to face a winter! With money in our pockets and the man of the family at home, instead of freezing on the bitter seas!"

"Yes, Habakkuk, I do think that. I do praise the Lord for the mercy He has shown us. You don't know the dread that filled me at the thought of going into the little house in Danvers. With nothing laid by to face the cold weather there, with all the children, and Nat so delicate—"

Habakkuk pushed the thick hair up from his forehead, and leaned toward his wife. "Nat? Always Nat is in your mind. Nat is so delicate!"

Mary did not sense the scorn beneath the words, but took them at the surface.

Habakkuk and Mary

"Nat is different," she said decisively, "different from all the other children. You can see it in him, if you watch him closely. I think you can see marks of later character in a child."

"Yes," muttered Habakkuk, "as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

"He is different," Mary repeated. "Nothing must happen to him."

Late that night, Mary Bowditch wakened suddenly. Red paint—or was it blood?—seemed to be smeared over her eyelids. She heard shouts and calling. It was her mind forsaking her, some part of her spirit torn loose and pressed bloodily on her eyes. . . . Her eyes. . . . She opened them suddenly. Some one was banging on the door downstairs, and people in the street were shouting "Fire!"

It was the Great Fire of October 6, 1774, the fire that swallowed Dr. Whitaker's church, the Custom House, eight dwellings, and fourteen stores.

The Great Fire spared Habakkuk's house, though it raged far into the next day on all sides. It was well that Habakkuk's house was spared; for after the fire his connection with the Boston insurance companies was ended, and he was forced to sell the house. About the first of the year 1775 the family moved through the snow to the little house in Danvers. In the spring Habakkuk was to work as a hand on the Derby farm.

Habakkuk's troubles seemed too much for him to bear. He found himself a berth as mate, and went to sea.

Mary Bowditch and her family faced the winter in Danvers alone.

Jonathan Ingersoll told Mary she might keep the

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house, but that unless she left Habakkuk for good, he would do nothing further for her.

V

The little house stood by itself near a clump of gaunt young elms and elder bushes. Bare, straight, and forbidding in its clipped precision, it seemed like a packing case tossed aside from the road, then carefully leveled and placed upright. The snow filled in around it through the long nights and the dull cold days.

The interior of the house was as plain as the outside. The family lived, cooked, ate, and worked on the ground floor. All slept in the single room upstairs.

The only ornament in the downstairs room was a model of a ship that stood over the doorway. Elias Derby had given it to Nat. Mary Bowditch wondered if it might be a presage of evil fate—that her boys would leave by that door to go to sea, and be like their father.

But such thoughts were superstitious; life was not influenced by omens, but by the precise ordering of the Lord. And Elias Derby's present must be preserved; for she wanted him to continue his friendly interest in Nat.

Now Mary Bowditch was often too sick and weak from her approaching confinement to do the cooking. Little Mary at these times scurried about with great importance, following her mother's instructions. At night she prayed with vehemence by her mother's bed, and out of her hunger voiced fantastic phrases of request to her Deity. Yet, out of the strong pride that

Habakkuk and Mary

was in her, Mary Bowditch would not face her brother Jonathan again. And so the winter slowly passed.

VI

Mary Bowditch woke from a night of pain and troubled sleeping to find the new moon shining full in her face. It was bright in the mild air of coming spring—a fixed brilliance in all that troubling softness of the earth's reviving life. She looked over where Nat lay. He, too, was awake, and staring out the window.

She lay for some time without the strength to move. She knew that Nat was hungry, and that he would soon begin to cry, and have to be rocked back to sleep in her arms.

Nat turned over in his crib with a slight cry. The bright light of the moon was shining on him. Mary got out of bed, and took Nat in her arms.

“See the moon, Nathaniel—how bright it is!”

She sang to him, an old sea chantey, and rocked her chair slowly. She fell asleep from weariness. But Nat's eyes did not close. They remained fastened where Mary Bowditch had left them—on the curious look of the moon.

Chapter Two

I

IN the spring of 1775 Mary Bowditch had an acute illness, and Dr. Holyoke was forced to intervene against her will. While Mary Bowditch was held to the limits of the upper floor, old Dame Bowditch came over from the Ingersoll farm and ruled the house with vehemence and ferocity.

The children were all glad enough to escape to the old crone who kept school down the road. Even little Nat was carried off with them. Although there was no instruction possible for him at his age, if he had remained about the house he would have had to listen to his grandmother's stories of the Indians. She told him these yarns to stimulate obedience, and she succeeded in making perfectly clear to him just what an Indian was.

"He stands over in the bushes till dark. Then he runs forward crouching, rises up yelling war-cries, and waves his tomahawk."

Nat's eyes betrayed a question. It was not clear to him what a tomahawk was. Dame Bowditch tottered to the kitchen table, picked up the meat cleaver, tottered back to the boy. She let him feel the cold steel at the back of his neck. Then she brought it down with a crack on a small stick of kindling wood, and together they watched the two pieces of it snap up into the air.

If Dame Bowditch threatened Nathaniel with figures of her imagination, she herself was not without strange fancies. At night she heard the carousing of a group

Habakkuk and Mary

of wild youths and riff-raff who later were to become recruits for the Continental Army, boasting, talking loudly about the terrible things that would happen if ever an army should be raised against the King. She slept alone in the downstairs room, and before she went to bed, she tremblingly bent to look under it.

At length, matters mended a little. Habakkuk returned from his voyage to the Indies in September, and brought almost a hundred dollars with him for his eight months afloat. He was greatly relieved to find his family had not increased in his absence.

In the evening Habakkuk told over and over again the incidents of his voyage, and showed the children the teeth he had cut from a shark. The children passed the yellow fangs from one to another with the solemnity of a ritual.

Habakkuk had a lively gift for telling stories, and in them his shipmates came to life robustly. Before a month had passed they were almost familiar members of the family.

After these stories, Habakkuk would take down the ancient family Bible from the mantel and read from his favorite book of Job in a slow, deep voice. Oftentimes, when disheartened by misfortune, he had found himself in peculiar sympathy with Job.

Mary Bowditch sat quietly in her chair these evenings, and watched with a smile all that went on.

II

While Habakkuk's sea-pay lasted, he played with the children, took pleasure in goading Jonathan Ingersoll, and talked politics with Elias Derby.

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As an incident in the career of many men of his time who chose to follow the sea, Habakkuk had been apprenticed to a cooper. And not only was he proficient in assembling shooks and heads into barrels, but he was a carpenter as well. He now found time to repair the leaks in the roof of the house, and to patch the gaps in the walls and sides in desultory fashion. At least the wind would not drive the snow through into the house as it swept over the open fields; and with each crack plugged, a sense of virtuous self-satisfaction filled Habakkuk's soul. He fell to carving objects in wood. Mary was to have another baby in the spring, and he was growing eager to be off to the Indies before life's complications began to disturb him anew.

Mary had perceived how the restless movements of her husband would intensify when she talked about the coming child. The following day Habakkuk would disappear toward Salem to see what ships might be in the harbor.

Meanwhile Habakkuk could not escape a trace of remorse at the irresponsibility of his approaching departure. He realized that his prosperity as a shipmaster in these days of trade depression was over, and that his pay of fifteen dollars a month as mate could not compare with what he might earn if he went with Joshua Phippen and planed staves and hammered up casks.

Habakkuk's remorse did not vent itself in prayer, but in a visit to Jonathan Ingersoll. He came upon Jonathan in the midst of late plowing, and casually asked him whether it was easier to plow tough frosted dirt than to plow salt water with a keel.

Jonathan came to the end of a furrow, and paused in his work.

Habakkuk and Mary

"The Devil take you, Habakkuk Bowditch!" he sputtered. "The Devil take you!"

"Now those be strong words for a God-fearing man," cautioned Habakkuk, enjoying every drop of perspiration on Jonathan's brow.

"You'll come to no good end, Habakkuk. I tell you the ocean will swallow you up." He smacked his lips. "And leave your family for me to take care of," he added sourly.

Habakkuk pestered Jonathan a full hour, and came away convinced that, as a seaman, he was following the only occupation for a self-respecting man. Life ashore made a man mean and small.

And so, the day came for Habakkuk to bid his family another farewell. He disappeared down the road in the first snow flurry of November. His feet left gray prints in the light white covering of the earth.

III

In Danvers the winter of 1776 was severe. By Christmas, fence-posts were buried in a soft blanket of snow that kept creeping higher each day the skies were dark. In the long evenings Mary Bowditch sat by a candle mending the clothes of her children. The little garments prepared for last year's baby would serve for the baby she expected in the spring. Habakkuk's repairs to the gaps in the sheathing of the house had not been too carefully made, or the winds sweeping over the fields were too searching, for the small heart-shaped flame of the candle bent at intervals under the force of the leaping gusts, then straightened.

Mary split wood for the fire, cooked, and sewed. In

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between, she tried to teach the children their letters and numbers. In the coldest weather, they all slept in one big bed, downstairs, before the fire. And in this manner they survived the winter.

The child Mary expected was born on May 5th, 1776, and was named William—a puny little fellow, and ugly at first. Whether hardships had so dulled Mary Bowditch that she could no longer feel pain, or whether she was so exhausted that fatigue no longer had a separate meaning, the fact remained that Dr. Holyoke considered the affair quite successful.

Although William seemed weak at first, after a few months of nursing he absorbed strength enough to cry. And cry lustily he did, when the aged Mr. Barnard baptized him. That hale old parson did not outlive the first six months of the life of this youngest and weakest member of his parish. He died in August of 1776, and Jonathan took Mary into Salem—one of her rare visits to town—to attend the funeral.

News was there of Habakkuk's ship. And not long afterward Mary Bowditch again had her husband in Danvers, with new stories for the children, more curios for the cabinet museum.

Fantastic pieces of coral, dried kelp from the tropics, and strange coins and minerals he had picked up, did much to fill the shelves. Still, after Habakkuk gave the children some of the less precious shells, there was space for more. He looked at the vacancy often, and spoke of the fleet Elias Derby was arming to assist in the war. More than twenty-six vessels! And the wild-cat Joseph Peabody in command of one of them! Habakkuk was not long in responding to his country's need and to the good fellowship of the crew, whose

Habakkuk and Mary

patriotism was often embroidered in rum. Salem kept her ships and seamen profitably and continuously active throughout the Revolution—with privateering and contraband West Indies' trade.

Not until the early winter of 1778 was Habakkuk again seen in Danvers. Less jovial than was usual with him during the first few weeks of his stay ashore, he sat silently by the fire in the evenings, heedless of the clamorings of his children for tales of adventure. With the spring, he was away again; this time to Madeira as mate on a ship with a cargo of shooks, to return with wine.

That fall, on September 5th, 1778, Mary Bowditch had her sixth child, and named him Samuel. Although Dr. Holyoke was somewhat case-hardened to large families that had to struggle with primitive conditions, when she told him she was coughing blood quite regularly, he warned her that Samuel must be her last child.

When Habakkuk returned in October from his Madeira voyage, the good doctor met him at the wharf and explained the situation to him. But the change that had been subtly eating through Habakkuk's fiber displayed itself in a general indifference. He shrugged his shoulders.

"What is the matter with you, man!" cried the doctor. "You don't seem to understand your wife is in danger of death. I have barely saved her for you. She has consumption."

"Well, something has changed in me," muttered Habakkuk in surly response. "I can't tell any one about it. They'd laugh—say it was ghosts. But on this

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last Madeira voyage, I tell you I saw a strange thing come out of the sea—”

“Come, come, my man. Brace yourself. Too much wine in Funchal has befuddled sailors before you.”

“Well, I talk of what I’ve seen with my own eyes, and be damned to what landlubbers say. Now this thing has done something to me—”

Dr. Holyoke looked at Habakkuk closely. “It may be some tropical fever you have caught—bad water, or spoiled food.”

Habakkuk grunted impatiently. “I’ve had those. It’s not that. It’s something gone in here.” He struck his chest. “I don’t know what’s happened. But I know I’m no good.” His eyes showed that what he spoke was true. Something was obscurely absent from them. As if he had lost his spirit, and pined for a sight of the beautiful evil that had destroyed it.

“This much you must do,” said the doctor decisively. “You must move your family into town before the winter sets in.”

Young Nat, who had come with Hab to meet the ship, ran up and shook his father’s leg with his hands.

“Father, how many days will it be before summer?”

Habakkuk patted the boy’s yellow head kindly. “I don’t know, Nat. Ask your mother.”

By December, Mary Bowditch had begun to cough blood again, lying awake at night, and smothering her coughs with the bedclothes to keep from waking the children.

Habakkuk at last undertook his duty, and by January, 1779, had moved his family into Salem.

With a sudden childlike good nature he went back to coopering. He worked in Phippen’s cooperage shop

Habakkuk and Mary

all day, hammering away at his old boyhood trade. At night he came home with the fresh smell of oak on his tarred sailor's trousers.

IV

Hab resolutely refused to go to school, and his father defended him—said he needed the boy to hold up staves while he hooped them. So eleven-year-old Hab worked with his father in the cooperage shop.

In the fall of 1779 Henry Prince was apprenticed to Joshua Phippen. Henry's cousin, John Prince, had come to the First Church to fill the vacancy left by the death of Mr. Barnard. He began his duties in November, and the boy Henry was sent on from Ipswich to be under the Reverend John's eye. Henry was fourteen, a little more than two years older than Hab, and his arrival and apprenticeship to Joshua Phippen meant a closer companionship for Hab than young Nat could offer. Together the two boys would laugh at Habakkuk's jokes, and endeavor to pry from him a story of the sea.

Henry Prince was firmly determined to follow the sea, and added fresh stimulus to Hab's earlier dreams. Whenever a ship sailed from the Derby wharf, both boys were sure to be found somewhere in the crowd, still with intense excitement and longing. They would go back reluctantly to the splintery hoops and sharp oak staves with the indelible memory of a beautiful ship gliding out over the table of the bay.

They would beg Habakkuk for a story of the time when he was afloat, some story of strange ports, and the natives. But ordinarily at such times Habakkuk

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was silent. He never went to a launching, or to the wharf to watch a departure. The sea had put some secret mark on him. He had beheld some evil beauty that he could not forget. It was not long before this mystery was apparent to the boys, and when Habakkuk was on the other side of the shop, they used to whisper their speculations as to what it could have been.

Mary, at fourteen, had followed Hab's example, and had given up going to school. She was needed all day in the house to help her mother; when the coughing fits returned, her mother would be helpless for several hours, and would sit with a white face in her rocking chair striving to stifle them. After the spell had passed, she was so weak that she had to lie on the bed and rest. . . .

V

This town of Salem that cradled young Nathaniel Bowditch—while life slowly carried his frail body on its tide, this Salem, that was old when he was born, had been changing. More ancient in aspect than Boston, it was growing to the position of Boston's chief competitor for America's sea-borne trade. The cluster of houses on the shoreward side of Derby Street had grown to seventeen hundred in number. Salem in 1779 could boast about seven thousand people in all, and was the sixth largest city of the United States.

Richard Derby had a glazed cupola built on the top of his house, from which to view arrivals. With powdered wig and scarlet cloak, he daily mounted the stairway to the roof with wheezing difficulty. Cuff, his body servant, turbaned and dressed in his native costume, followed with his master's spy-glass.

Habakkuk and Mary

The seething activity of the wharf-line beneath him showed the result of an arrival the day before. He swept the battered spy-glass up to his heavy-browed right eye and traced the arc of the horizon southward from Marblehead to Naugus. . . .

Down Derby Street passed demure young ladies with nicely ribboned bonnets, and men of ascetic mien—stern and religious even in their pace. A drunkard rolled headfirst from a tavern. Stores were filled with merchandise of other lands. Here was a Puritan town whose fleet was bringing the very glare of far waters up from the quayside, reflected softly in the leaves of the arching elms.

II

DANVERS MEADOWS AT NIGHT

Chapter Three

I

THE nineteenth of May, 1780, is put down in the annals of Salem as "Dark Day." From the diaries of contemporaries one gathers it was one of those days when the sun, if it appeared at all, was deeply obscured in grimy mist, a dull red dot. Pynchon's diary records: "Dark morning about 10, the darkness increased and people used candles to get dinner and read. Cocks began to crow as in the night. Persons in the streets became melancholy and fear seized all. . . . In the evening, although the moon was up and full, yet it was darker than ever seen by any."

That morning the surface of the bay spread out from the wharves, motionless, flat, quickly vanishing. Momentarily a few tall masts and their spars might be seen from the higher parts of the town, quickly to be blotted out. Hardened sailors, shrewd merchants, devout members of the church—all were held by the awe that the queer light cast over their familiar town.

The well-known lines of the harbor shore, of the roofs, and the vista down a street so clear, so distinct, it could be remembered four thousand miles across an ocean—all were changed, mysteriously transformed. On the ships, men with tanned faces and reddened necks, whose assured voices commonly barked down silver speaking-trumpets to crews at work, subdued

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their roars. Other voices, where men conversed in knots about the town, took on strained, hushed tones.

Most particularly, Dark Day set off a train of small happenings in the Bowditch family. To young Nat came his first taste of terror. For him the day was coupled with unusual significance, culminating in a sense of personal guilt and tumult of the soul. That childhood terror left marks on Nat's character which never quite left him. It was not only the queerness of the day itself. By accident, its strangeness seemed to have a personal meaning, to be the mark of a special divine disapproval pointed directly at him.

II

The nineteenth had been set for the launching day of a vessel in which Joshua Phippen owned an interest. Hab now had the lingo and walk of an old man of the sea. He lived in dreams of far ports and distant shores, and continued at the cooper's trade only with stolid reluctance. Henry Prince shared with Hab the ambitious dream of command. And when Henry was not about, there was Nat, eager to be Hab's cabin boy, to fetch his spy-glass, and to help dramatize his dreams.

The promised holiday on the nineteenth was eagerly awaited by Hab and Henry Prince. To Nat, who overheard their talk of plans, the only promise the day held was a possible invitation from his older brother to serve in some humble capacity in an expedition that each day assumed some new and more alluring detail.

Henry had first suggested that they sail in a dory across the bay to Beverly. Hab would hear of nothing but a course laid straight to sea—to determine whether,

Danvers Meadows at Night

in a day's sailing, they might go out of sight of land; and then, by compass, return and make the harbor. Nat foresaw his certain exclusion from so daring an adventure.

Joshua Phippen did not care what his two apprentices did on the holiday, provided their chatter did not lead to idleness in the shop. Habakkuk offered no opposition at all. Habakkuk would have listened with only mildly stirred paternal responsibility to a proposal to scale the South Pole or to cruise the China Sea.

But in the Bowditch home, these free and easy talks about the cruise were more difficult. Hab's mother was definitely a conservative, and her instantaneous objection and resistance to such a scheme, should she hear of it, quickly made of the Bowditch home the preferred place of conference. The boys relished the danger.

They must observe a secrecy, and speak only in veiled allusions, dangerously. It heightened the allure of the whole voyage to discuss it softly in the Bowditch parlor. What was commonplace in the shop became devilish when discussed behind the torn quilts of the Bowditch parlor sofa. As the approaching feet of the enemy were in plain sight beneath its curved seat, the seclusion was approximately ideal.

Nat had his own private place of retirement. Just as his father sought refuge from the family in the Tavern, so Nat felt the need of a place of escape from the irritating orders of his sister Mary, adolescent top-sergeant of the Bowditch platoon, from the interminable crying fits of William and Samuel, and from the racking cough of his mother.

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That cough frightened Nat out of his skin whenever he heard it. If his mother covered her mouth with her hand, and that queer look came into her eyes, Nat would slip quickly out of the room and away to his own secluded nook in the normally unfrequented attic. Up there, all seemed quiet below, and he was alone—free to lie on an old piece of bedding, and to conjure up pleasant fancies of voyage and adventure.

Soon after supper on the evening of the eighteenth, Hab heard Henry Prince's whistle outside the window, and joined him instantly. They were as yet undecided as to whose dory they would borrow for the coming cruise, and there was much to discuss. Cautiously the pair crept in the front doorway, and sought the parlor, only to find the sofa occupied by Samuel, suffering from a sore throat, and ministered to by Elizabeth. Hastily they withdrew.

Of those still in the kitchen, Nat alone heeded the dwindling whispers of the two receding conspirators. In his heart he felt a slowly increasing sadness that he was not one of them, and contemplated the cracked china dishes on the table with a grief that filled his eyes with tears.

Habakkuk was telling Mary the many useful things which he planned to do about the house on the coming holiday. Mary listened with her head bent slightly forward. Backs were needed in two hickory chairs, a rung and much dowelling for the pine chairs in the kitchen, a strap for the ladder-back rocker in the parlor. The roof leaked, and Habakkuk had delayed its mending through all the melting snow. Some bricks were loose in the arch of the fireplace.

"May God be merciful to you, Habakkuk, when you

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come into his vineyards." She closed her eyes, and sighed. The swaying tallow dip on the table threw her eyes into moving shadows, and made them darker than ever in her angular face. Then, her chin tilted, with a mock show of force:

"And how many corks will you pull?"

Habakkuk wrinkled his red face, and scratched at his beard.

"Now, now, my woman," he announced with an assumed jocularity, "you'll not be there to count them when they fall. When I am through at the house I shall drink at the tavern; oh, I shall drink—" Habakkuk's voice rumbled off into liquid syllables that expressed the passionate and moving sensations stirred by the prospect of rum.

"I have been driven from the face of the seas by a more horrible vision than ever human eye saw, rising from the foam, right at the cutwater. But I can drink. Yes; that is left me. The liquor runs into my blood and melts it like the spring sunlight on slush. Listen, Mary, my good woman—would you have a man who's been through what I have face life with just weak watery blood in his veins?"

Mary answered with a nod and a sigh.

Habakkuk shook his head earnestly. "You act that way, but you don't understand. Nobody can understand."

"Habakkuk," returned his wife, "I only hope that our Lord will fail to understand. Doubtless He will, and you will remain in Heaven, forever explaining—"

At the foot of the table, little Mary sat frowning. "Please, mother."

"Yes?"

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"Mother, I don't think Nat ought to be in the room."

Nat's eyes had been fixed on his mother's face for some time. Now he saw her take a sip of water and swallow it hurriedly. He recognized the symptom. That, and not his sister's broad hint, was his signal to slide from his chair, slip from the room, tip-toe upstairs, and grope his way to the attic ladder. As he climbed to the loft, a faint show of light quickened his movements.

III

As Nat's eyes rose above the floor, two bent forms slowly became distinct against the light of a single tallow dip. Too frightened to cry out or to move, he clung to the ladder. Now he heard voices, and with great relief recognized Hab and Henry.

What could they be talking about, up there? He held his breath to listen, and silently crawled up and near them.

His heart began to beat too hard. He was too eager. A board creaked.

Hab jumped up, alarmed—saw it was Nat.

"How much did you hear, little sneak?"

"I'm not a sneak and I know everything."

Hab moved toward his younger brother with doubled fists. Henry restrained him. He had an idea.

"Let Nat listen," he urged. "We might be drowned, and no one would know where we were." His eyes grew round. "We must let them know we died like sailors."

Hab paused. There was something in that. Death was certainly never to be overlooked by a prudent sailor.

Danvers Meadows at Night

"Yes," he agreed; "if anything happens . . . They must know it was because they would not let us go to sea like other boys on a regular ship. They will see it was their own fault."

This much decided, silent Nat—after a fearful oath of secrecy against premature disclosure of the plan—was admitted to the conclave. Explicit instructions were provided for his guidance should the boys not appear by supper-time to-morrow. He was made shore agent of the expedition.

Trembling with his responsibility, Nat squatted beside the other two, and tried to listen. Excitement kept him from complete understanding. All he gathered was that they disagreed about the respective merits of available dories. Outside the little circle of light shed by the flickering candle the attic seemed full of dimly moving shadows. To Nat they evoked images that frightened him. The leopard skin downstairs—the most valued item of Habakkuk's museum—might even have come to life, and crept up here without their noticing it. It might be lurking in those shadows where they could not see it!

Nat could never believe the leopard skin was quite dead, so cleverly had a Beverly taxidermist stuffed the head with scarlet tongue rolling out over the fierce white teeth. Great glass eyes shone with a ferocious glitter.

Once Hab had slipped his slim body under the skin and, gliding into the hall with low growls, had sprung at Nat.

The fit of crying into which it threw him lasted for hours. Habakkuk was angry. Anything but a squalling brat in the evening! Sternly he forbade the chil-

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dren ever to play with the skin again. It was worth, he told them—and indeed it represented that to him—the price of a ship.

Often Nat saw the leopard alive at night . . . and now, here in the dim attic . . . it would be so easy for the beast to sneak up after him! Maybe it would jump out at them, with terrible claws outstretched . . . He gave a sharp cry.

Startled out of their whispering, Hab and Henry turned pale, and peered into the darkness.

"What is it, Nat?" whispered Henry.

Nat was ashamed. He had thought he'd seen the eyes of the leopard alive in the dark. It would never do to let that out. The boys would laugh. He must say something—anything. He stammered:

"Let's go on a hunt."

"What kind of a hunt?"

"He means muskrats by the wharf!"

"Or porcupines!"

"For children!"

"I mean," said Nat slowly, "let's go on a leopard hunt to-morrow. I know where there are several."

"Nat's been seein' things," explained Hab to Henry. "You know the leopard skin downstairs."

"They're valuable, leopards are," defended Nat. "I heard father say you could buy a ship with that skin."

Henry looked at Hab. To buy a real ship would be just the thing.

Hab nodded. "He did say that."

Henry looked at Nat closely, "I know where I can get a gun. You say you know where there are some leopards?"

"That's the idea!" cried Hab. "Better than goin' to Beverly in a dory."

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"Yes," assented Henry; "to go to sea you ought to have a ship."

And so it was decided to hold a leopard hunt on the holiday. Nat was to show them where the leopards were. Henry would bring a gun, which he could abstract with ease from under the very nose of his reverend cousin John Prince.

IV

The next morning was queer. A dim sort of yellowish light was over everything, like the light that came through a barn window yellowed with hay-dust.

Nat was routed from his bed early, to borrow a loaf of bread for breakfast. The queer yellow light outside bewildered him. The air was cool. The bay, the street, everything was in its place—but queer. The sun was a dull red dot. Then he remembered. This was the day of the leopard hunt. Hab and he were to meet Henry after breakfast. He tucked the warm loaf from a kindly neighbor tighter under his arm.

What made it so dark? Nat rubbed his eyes. The lids were open all right; they were not stuck; he could wink them easily. It was not like lying on your back in a field and looking up at the sun through closed eyes. It—it was queer.

Maybe it was because he was hungry. He absently attacked the warm loaf under his arm, and ate some of the soft inside of it. That made him feel better. Then he had an idea. Hastily he tore out a whole handful from the inside of the loaf, and put it in his pocket.

He straightened up and, with the unconcerned air of a fully equipped explorer, walked home.

Navigator

V

Mary Bowditch, discovering Nat's depredations on the loaf, was angry, and threatened confinement to the house as punishment. Habakkuk persuaded her to consider the lad's appetite and to relent. Nat was quick to take advantage of this leniency, and to disappear with Hab.

The lurid darkness of the day was soon the uppermost topic of conversation. What could it be? Perhaps it would be wise to seek ministerial counsel. A more professional opinion on a visitation so unearthly was appropriate. This day might be the fulfillment of some Biblical prophecy, the first dread event of a new dispensation.

Mary felt this probable. Hab and Nat had gone with Henry, they had briefly explained, to visit Uncle Jonathan Ingersoll in Danvers. Why had she let them go?

"Oh, Habakkuk," she groaned, "I wish the boys were with me now. I fear this day! Don't go to the tavern. Come with me to the church. This darkness cast over the earth may be the shadow of the Lord approaching in awful majesty to judge the world."

VI

Meanwhile the leopard hunt was under way. Out over the fields and hills toward Danvers the boys pressed on, leaving the bay and town behind them. As the day grew on, their eyes became more accustomed to the light, and it seemed less yellow. It remained dark, however, and there was a heavy mist. All

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avoided speaking of it; yet subtle misgivings gnawed at the heart of each and kept their nerves on the jump, their small hands moist. The leaves on the trees, and the grass, showed an intense and unusual green. The boys for the most part were silent.

It was a grim business, marching this way—like war. The gun sat heavily on Henry's shoulder as he trudged along. After an hour or two, the weight of the ancient fowling-piece became more and more burdensome. Henry asked for frequent rests.

Hab grew impatient. "I guess I'd better carry the gun."

Henry gave it up regretfully.

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes," answered Henry; "a lot of old nails I found."

"Powder?"

"Rammed full."

"How much farther, Nat?" asked Hab.

Nat was silent, mysterious, and twisted this way and that, with his hands in his pockets.

"Come, Nat," urged Henry; "tell us how far is it to the leopards?"

Nat shrugged his shoulders, and peered into the mist. He crumbled some soft bread from his pocket, and spilled it on the ground.

"What's that?" asked Henry.

"Bait," was Nat's laconic answer.

"We must be near Uncle Jonathan's pasture," Hab guessed, looking around in an effort to get his bearings.

"Now!" said Nat in a hushed voice. "Let's hide in those bushes till the leopard comes."

All three withdrew to the clump indicated. It grew

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on a slope, and the dim ground spread off below into a mist-filled hollow.

Mutiny threatened soon after the ambush was formed. Henry demanded the first shot. Hab dissented. Holding the gun, he had the advantage. To settle the question, at Nat's suggestion they drew lots—and Henry won.

Hab reluctantly handed over the weapon. Henry primed it with a professional air to be ready for instant use. Then they waited.

Nat fidgeted uneasily with his jacket. In the course of an hour Hab and Henry, too, began to grow restless. They wanted to know—"When?"

"Let's get a woodchuck," muttered Hab sourly. "I don't believe there are any leopards here. I never saw one."

"You don't know," sneered Nat through his teeth. "You don't know. To-day is different. On days like this they come out."

Suddenly Nat's peering eyes fixed on an object moving slowly through the mist.

"Hush!" he warned.

Henry dropped prone with the gun, and Nat and Hab followed suit.

"Where is it, Nat?" whispered Hab.

Nat pointed.

The others, too, saw something moving—a strange-looking, barely visible animal.

"If you miss," Hab warned Henry, "it's my turn."

"Not yet!" pleaded Nat. "It's coming this way!"

The three boys waited breathlessly for the approaching leopard to come within range.

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"It has spots," confirmed Hab in a tense voice.

"Wait!" pleaded Nat . . .

A flash and thunder rocked the whole earth. The universe was split apart with reverberant echoes. The boys' eyes were blinded by the flash and the smoke of the ancient gun.

Henry was the first to recover. He stood up and gave a triumphant cry. Terrifying bellowing and roaring of an infuriated beast filled the air.

"Hear him!" cried Henry, undaunted. "I hit him the first time. He's going into the death struggle! Come on!"

The other boys crept out from the bushes after Henry. From far off they could hear a man's voice. They ran eagerly toward their prize—to skin it.

Henry's face was blackened by powder burns, and his eyes were red from the sting of the smoke. But he ran on.

Suddenly a hand caught him up roughly. Nat and Hab flew by.

"Let me go! Let me go!" cried Henry.

"Stop, ye devil cat! I've got ye!"

With an indignant look Henry faced his captor. Jonathan Ingersoll held him by the collar.

From down in the hollow came a disappointed howl from Hab. His voice came faintly through the thick air:

"It's only a cow!"

Henry heard, and over his powder-blackened face rushed agonies of fear and disappointment and terror.

Jonathan was not prepared for a face like Henry's. He let go his grip, and started back in fright.

"Mary! Mary!" he shouted to his wife. "It's

Navigator

Jedgment Day itself! The Black Day! Oh, Lord Jehovah!" Jonathan sank to his knees. "Devils, black devils—"

"Run!" screamed Henry as he found himself free.
"Run!"

Chapter Four

I

NAT could not run as fast as Hab and Henry. When he stopped running, he was alone. With the cessation of his pounding footsteps, the earth was suddenly still—and so dark! Above, in place of the sun, was an inflamed spot of angry red like a lidless eye ground raw by dust.

There were some elms at Nat's right. The gray limbs dripped in the fog. The drops fell slowly. Now and then a slight breeze creaked the branches. Then the interminable stillness pulsed again in Nat's ears.

Desperately he called out: "Hab!"

Maybe the boys were waiting near by and would hear him.

"Hab! . . . Henry!"

There was no other sound. He was off the road. Which road? The Danvers road? He didn't know. If he knew, perhaps he could find Elias Derby's house . . . which way?

It was so dark . . .

God had seen his sin.

That was why it was dark. Suddenly his stomach seemed empty and weak. His legs would not support him. He fell to sobbing, and collapsed. He was on the ground. God had stricken him down. He had been cut down by His anger.

After Nat had sobbed himself out, his plight began to seem somewhat unjust. After all, he had not shot

Navigator

Uncle Jonathan's cow. He had not even carried the gun.

Why should he be singled out in this way for punishment?

It was wrong and unfair.

But how could God understand Nat hadn't even wanted to come, if Nat did not tell Him?

He must pray. He must tell God the whole story, and let Him judge.

He knelt in the wet grass, and turned his face up to the sky, with tight-shut eyes.

"Oh, God, I didn't come to kill Thy creatures. It was Hab and Henry—"

He opened his eyes wide. *That was a lie—to God.*
He closed his lids again.

"Give me back the daylight, O Lord!" he moaned.

His head bent forward, and his lips were still. He fancied he could feel the Mercy of God descending on him, coming down over the field with a warm, sweet light.

He opened his eyes.

To his horror, he saw, instead, the darkness increase. Slowly it grew entirely dark. The sun was wholly blotted out—while moments slowly passed. He tried to recall where he had seen that angry red spot in the sky. He could not remember.

He started up with a cry, and ran stumbling through the soaking grass and the brambles.

II

At the special noon-day meeting in the church, the Reverend John Prince might have courageously dis-

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played his love of learning and his knowledge of natural science. He chose, however, after prayer, to explain the phenomenon of Dark Day to his people from Revelation rather than from the nautical almanac. Distant forest fires could well have been a supplement to the almanac.

But John Prince had an excellent—to be exact, a professional—understanding of the fact that Salem did not entertain measured gods. The cloudy prose of his mystic delivery was more nicely suited to his congregation.

This indeed served very well while the good people were together in the church, under the spell of his eloquence; but when they separated, fears grew anew. The Bible was in the hands of every wise person in Salem. At the tavern, for once the amount of talk produced outrivaled the amount of drink consumed.

Hab and Henry appeared late in the afternoon. They were muddy and silent. Henry had managed to clean most of the powder burns from his face, and quietly melted into the background.

Habakkuk, feeling the awe of the day, was trying to sober up with a pail of cold water for his head.

As evening came on, and Nat did not appear, Hab was plied with questions, and narrowly avoided confession. He had left Nat on his way to visit Elias Derby, to see the ship-models in his study. That was all he knew.

After Mary and Habakkuk had discussed the matter at length, little Elizabeth bravely took the situation in her own hands. She put on her hat and coat, and fetched a lantern from the cellar.

Habakkuk regarded her with surprise.

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"Elizabeth, where are you going?"

"To fetch Nat."

"He's all right. Your brother Hab said he was at the Derby's."

"No," said Elizabeth firmly, "I don't believe that. Something's happened to Nat, and I'm going to find him."

"What's that under your arm?"

"The almanac."

Habakkuk laughed, and slapped his knee.

"Yes," went on Elizabeth, "Nat is afraid because it is dark, and I'm going to show him in the almanac what Ben Carraway told me down at the dock. I'm going."

Habakkuk guffawed: "Ben Carraway and the almanac!"

Mary spoke sharply to her mother. "You're not going to let her do that, a child only eight years old, Mother? Don't let her go. Nat's all right."

Mary Bowditch shook her head. "I don't know, Mary. I don't know. Nat may be frightened about the dark—because of what he did to the bread this morning. I told him once God would take the light of day from him if he did wrong."

"Then that's it," murmured Elizabeth. "I'm going."

"No; not alone, my dear."

Habakkuk sighed: "I'll go."

He lifted his heavy coat down from the peg, and lighted the lantern with unsteady fingers, while Mary found warmer wraps for Elizabeth.

Mary Bowditch sat in her rocking chair and covered her eyes with her hand. She wanted to go, too. But she knew it was useless. She had not strength to walk half the way to Danvers.

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III

After the smoky argument and Medford rum of the Sun Tavern, Habakkuk Bowditch was distinctly pleased to be walking out on the grass-tufted road that led from Salem to Danvers. It was pleasant, too, to be away from a wife who saw in an overcast day the signal for the end of the world or the second coming of Christ. Habakkuk instinctively dodged all final and energetic thoughts.

He felt his spirits reviving under the cool air of early spring that seemed to lie close to the wet grass on either hand. His little daughter was silent. It was comforting that Elizabeth was conjuring up no strenuous situation. Indeed it was comforting.

Now they were nearing the Derby farm, the ample white house, softly shadowed in its bordering trees, caressed by them. Habakkuk was touched by the beauty of this many-windowed house, overlooking its wide acres, and with a little awe by the figure of its owner. People were saying old Richard would die soon, and Elias succeed him at the Derby counting-house and the Derby wharf. Elias had always been kindly disposed toward Habakkuk, even if he did not press him with offers of command. Elias had been kind to Nat, too.

Habakkuk resolved to use his errand to increase the favor that the boy enjoyed, to recall Nat's name to Elias.

He mounted the short flight of steps that led to the white pilastered doorway with appreciative feet. Those feet knew the beauty of that flight of steps. Habakkuk, when cooperage was dull and the mansion under repair, had come to Danvers and worked on them

Navigator

as carpenter. He had measured their suave ascent with his eye, and built them against the doorway with his hands.

Elias opened the door in response to Habakkuk's knock.

Elizabeth stood subdued by her father's side while he spoke, not even daring to glance beyond the opened door where flames flickered up into a wide fireplace over long oak logs.

"What?" exclaimed Elias; "your boy Nat lost? Well, he's not been here."

From within bellowed forth the testy voice of Richard Derby. "What? What?" he querulously shouted. "Is that Bowditch outside?"

Elias explained, with filial impatience, why Habakkuk had called. The old man grumbled that Bowditch was a worthless scoundrel, and every one in Salem and Danvers knew it.

"Can't even keep track of his brats!" he growled, retiring shakily to the fire.

Elias laughed at his father's futile irascibility. "If you find Nat, bring him here," he ordered. "He'll likely be cold and wet if he's been lost in the meadows."

Habakkuk withdrew regretfully, to follow his little daughter, as she led the way through the tall wet grass across the meadow. They tramped together silently, except at times when Elizabeth stopped to shout.

They both stopped. Something was moving in the grass.

Habakkuk forbade Elizabeth to go near it. More than likely it was an animal, though of just what sort was not in Habakkuk's mind for the moment.

But Elizabeth plunged ahead, and came on Nat. He

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was bent over, stumbling, sobbing, making half-crazed gestures with his arms to balance himself in his wild, exhausted attempt to run from his unrecognized rescuers.

Habakkuk was quite helpless. It was Elizabeth who bade her father carry Nat back to the Derby house, and who calmed him with soothing words. It was all right, she said, the almanac could explain Dark Day.

At the Derby house, Nat was undressed and rubbed dry before the fire. Elias himself superintended the boy's needs, gave him warm Madeira wine to drink, and ordered the servants about with all the severity and brusqueness of his father. He was touched at sight of the thin figure of the boy, as he stood naked by the fire. Nat's eyes seemed to hold an obscure, shy hurt—an injury that could not be reached by towels and Madeira—an injury that somehow appealed to some depth of Elias's nature and, to hide his feelings, made his sharp commands to the servants more necessary than the things they obediently brought.

When the wine had warmed the boy's stomach, and his drawn, pinched face was flushed from the fire and the warm blankets, Elias brought down a globe from the high bookcase, and tried to explain to him what a nautical man understood about an eclipse.

Nat spent that night at the Derby house, while Elizabeth and Habakkuk declined a cordial invitation, and trudged back toward Salem.

When Nat left the warm fireside, it was to sleep in a room where walls were lined with charts, ship-models, drawings. A carved mantel of dark walnut held shells, curious corals, and souvenirs of the Indies. Tucked beneath his pillow was a crumpled nautical almanac.

Navigator

IV

The storm gathered about Hab and Henry when Jonathan Ingersoll became articulate about the holiday adventure in the meadow, and the death of his cow. This isolated Nat. The entire attention of the family focused on Hab, and what should be done about him.

This concern about Hab—the idea that something must be done about Hab—suggested to Nat that something needed to be done about Nat; and that, if no one else bothered about him, he must do the job himself. Had it not been for the protracted family councils over Hab's fate, the experiences of Dark Day might have passed from Nat's mind into the oblivion that usually blots out recollections of child terror.

But there were after-supper conferences in the house with the Reverend John Prince, and once with Elias Derby. John Prince's solution of the problem was the one accepted. He pointed out that the principal object of the fantastic leopard hunt was the acquisition of a ship. If both boys desired so strongly to go to sea, the wisest course was to let them go. Incidentally they would also be subject to the stern discipline of a ship. Elias Derby agreed to arrange berths as cabin boys for the two culprits.

Uncle Jonathan strangely moderated his earlier choler, and admitted that the punishment awarded was severe enough to satisfy him for the death of his cow. Such devils, he was sure, belonged at sea. It would not be safe to permit them to pursue life ashore.

These nightly conferences in the Bowditch parlor continued for nearly a week. Habakkuk gave perfunctory assent to every proposal. Mary Bowditch

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tried to sift the justice of the matter. True, Habakkuk wanted Hab to keep on helping him to set up barrels, but Nat was growing up. In a year or so, Nat could help.

Nat listened to these discussions from upstairs, his ear to the floor, awaiting mention of his name. Hab's was the only one he heard. Expectation had kept pinching awake the old fear. At last it was apparent that for him there was to be no penalty, no confessional outlet of his sense of guilt. He was considered too young to be held blamable for the escapade. If only they would give him some punishment—make him sit in a chair without food for two days—then he would rise from that penance clean of the sins of the past.

Nothing was done to release him from this somber shadow of guilt. It was his to carry. A whipping would have been painful, but would have driven the matter forever from his memory. There was no whipping. And it remained.

And so, on his own insistence, in June, 1780, at the age of seven years and three months, Nat entered Watson's school—with the intent to learn ciphering, to do sums. What for? To clear the world of the terror of darkness, and so to clear himself. By deep devotion to his books, he could in time understand the almanac. And the almanac made dark things clear.

Nat knew this by no chain of conscious reasoning familiar to older humans. What he knew about his purpose, he knew through continued, intense feeling, mysteriously complex in his forming mind, though the result was simple. This instinct ran strong in him, and he could not be swerved from his determination to learn to cipher. It had become his fixed idea.

Chapter Five

I

NATHANIEL was somewhat disheartened at the actual material presented to a student at Salem's "most distinguished seminary of learning." The older boys did sums, the younger spelled aloud in chorus.

"Honorificabilitudinity" was split into eleven syllables. Each syllable of this favorite was spelled and pronounced until the whole comet-like word was spread across the close air of the little schoolroom.

There was only one dictionary, through which the master progressed about a page a week.

Nat followed along, though not without mumbling to himself shorter, more acid words. Some of these, even at Nat's slight age, were not to be found in the dictionary. They filtered through sharp ears that caught, from time to time, a bright-colored phrase from the vocabulary of his father.

Nat wanted to cipher more than to spell. The master, unable to understand this unusual thirst for figures, considered it abnormal and wrong. Several times Nat asked to be taken into the ciphering-room, only to be refused.

From the master's point of view, it would be bad policy to advance the boy too quickly. Others would try the same trick. And then what would become of "discipline"? Instead of teaching boys until they were sixteen, he would lose them when they were eleven. That would be neither "thorough," nor profitable.

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In February, Nat spoke about it to his father.

"He says if you will write a note, I can do sums with the older boys."

Habakkuk listened quietly to this unnatural request.

"Why, Nat, you're but eight years old. You've just started."

"I can do sums! I want to do them more than anything else!" Bobs of his tow-colored head emphasized his plea.

"How about coopering, son? If you don't like school, wouldn't you rather work in the shop?"

"But I do like school. Only, when I'm there, I want to do what I want."

Habakkuk was wise enough to perceive that by writing the note he would shorten his son's time at Wat-son's School by several years.

"Why do you make barrels, father?"

Habakkuk was taken aback. He had been about to consent to write the note about arithmetic, when the boy jumped to this. Nat was a queer one! But Habakkuk was patient.

"Barrels, my son, are the most important thing of all—for those ships you see in the bay. Without the cooper, cargoes would be dangerous in a storm. And it would take much longer to load and unload."

"Why, father?"

"Everything is packed in barrels—cloth, sugar, shoes, everything. Then it doesn't get loose in the hold. You can load and unload easily. Just roll the barrel. A barrel's stronger than a box. The more weight you put on top of it, the stronger it is. It's the most important thing of all."

Nat nodded assent.

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"Before you can be a captain, my boy, you must be a cooper. You want to go to sea some day, like Hab? Then you must learn to be a cooper."

"Henry didn't go to sea, father, like you said. He's a cooper."

"No; but that's the fault of his family in Ipswich. They said, 'not till he's twenty-one.'"

Nat pushed his shoe over the rug, and appeared to forget what he had been talking about. Then suddenly he put his hands on his father's knees.

"Please, father."

"What, son?"

"Write about my doing sums!"

Habakkuk laughed. "We are very poor, my boy, I don't know how long I can keep you in school. I'll explain that to the master, and we'll see."

Nat ran off to his mother to tell her the news.

Mary Bowditch was lying on the parlor sofa. Her face was white with pain. Exhaustion had emptied her eyes of life. Even Nat, looking at her, saw the fear, the thought of death in her face. All memory of his father's permission vanished. He knelt by her.

"Mother, you're not going to die?" Nat ever steered a straight course.

"What made you ask that, Nat?" She put her hand on his head.

"Your hand is cold. Are you afraid?"

"No, my son. If I die, I shall be with my Maker; and that is beautiful . . . Maybe you'll have another sister soon, Nat. Will you like that?"

"Like Elizabeth, Mother? Not like Mary."

Nat's voice broke off. He was looking out the window. Henry Prince was outside with his dog.

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His mother saw his far-off look, and thought it was concern for her. She reached her hand toward him. Toward the end of March Mary Bowditch was expecting her seventh child.

II

Nat's life at school was happier, now that he was with the older boys, and doing sums. Whenever a problem was set, he scratched his slate busily.

One eventful day—the day before Hab returned from his first voyage—Nat solved a particularly intricate problem in arithmetic. Straightway, before the whole class, the master accused him of fraud—"Some one helped you!"

Nathaniel could not understand. Whatever could be the point in answering the problem, if he did not solve it? Dishonesty, in the sense that some one else might have done it for him, was utterly out of the question. Not from any moral scruple. Simply because the answer did not exist for him unless he worked it out in his own mind. What was plain ciphering to Nat was—since miracles were out of date—plain fraud to his teacher. Nat said he figured out the answer himself on his slate. The master said some one else had figured it for him, and that Nat was offering another's solution as his own.

If Nat had difficulty in understanding what the master meant, he soon clearly understood what the master intended to do. He would use the cane on Nat, the following morning, before the whole school. He would do it now, but he wanted to give Nat the chance to think it over and to confess. Confession would lighten the punishment by five strokes.

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Nat knew that Hab's ship was lying in offing—by the harbor mouth. With favoring wind and tide the ship would tie up at the Derby Wharf in the morning, and Hab would come ashore. Nathaniel would be at the dock to greet him, and not in school. So, anyhow, the proposed caning would be deferred a day. Doubtless Hab—now that he was a sailor—would be able to do something about it. He wondered what Hab would look like. . . . The schoolroom, the whiskered schoolmaster, his coattails, the desks, the other children, faded from his consciousness. . . . Hab had promised to bring him a parrot from the Indies . . .

"Very well, then, my smart young mathematician," the other pupils heard the master say, "to-morrow morning we'll see about your 'talent.' We'll see how a night of reflection on this matter affects you." The voice stopped.

"Oh!" gasped Nat, startled by the sudden silence. He went quietly to his seat, and picked up his slate. Picture of a ship. Picture of a parrot. Parrots live to be a hundred years old. Three times five are—is—fifteen. It must be strange to go to sleep on a ship. Three times six is—are—eighteen. Henry Prince must envy him. A brother who was a sailor!

"And I want this to be an example to the whole class!" thundered the master.

III

Hab did intervene—in a roundabout way. One of his shipmates had a friend named Nathan Reed, a teacher in Beverly and Salem, holding school, too, circuit fashion, in the outlying districts. Reed had

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come to Salem fresh from Harvard that year, 1781. Hab, with a sailor's goodwill toward a friend's friend, sought to bestow on Reed the pupilship of his brother.

This rumored change coming to the ears of Watson, he visited Habakkuk, and agreed to a reduced rate of tuition and the omission of the caning.

Nat gained a direct friend. Reed took deep interest in the youngster of eight who could do simple multiplication and sums with great speed and amazing memory. Throughout his time of teaching in Salem and Beverly he was a frequent visitor at the Bowditch home.

Reed was just beginning to find life difficult. Curiously enough, he found a quality in Mary Bowditch that warmed him, and spurred him to achievement.

"I'd like to add to what the world has; and the only real addition is mechanical," he told her. "I'd rather have a trade than teach."

Mary Bowditch laughed when Nathan Reed talked to her, but her laughter invariably meant a later fit of coughing, after Reed had gone. On one of Reed's visits he was sent hurriedly for the doctor.

On March 29, 1781, a girl was born, and when Habakkuk sobered up, he found Reed still in the house, directing the mechanics of the household in a quiet voice. Reed had remained in the bedroom during the delivery, and himself had pinched the navel cord before it was cut . . . It was short work, and Mary Bowditch survived for that reason and for her perverse vitality.

Habakkuk's mother, old Dame Bowditch, aged in the years since her superintendence of Nathaniel's birth, was also present. She had been in Danvers, and a raw March gale could not stop her from coming. Her

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loose bones depended on a cane, and her flesh was shrunken. But her remarks about her son Habakkuk knew no change.

"Worthless scoundrel," she intoned, "bad because he *won't* get ahead—just sinks back—back. Now, why don't he go to sea? Eh?"

Reed threw her all in a flutter when he proposed removing a wart from her nose with nitric acid. She could get the acid from the druggist: muriatic, if he didn't have nitric. So the old dame shambled out and left Reed and the doctor and the worn woman to complete their work.

Spring came and opened on into the heat of summer. Hab went off to sea again, and with the exception of the new baby, life drifted on placidly, regularly. Lois, the baby, was unbelievably frail, excitable, hard to care for.

Before the year closed, two important events came, almost together, to take the whole family to Danvers—a funeral and a christening. The funeral was the end of Elias Derby's father, Richard Derby. While Elias tried to feel the grief that should have been his, the whole Derby fleet of vessels tugged at their anchors in his soul. That fleet was his now, and he would send it to the ends of the earth—and be the richest man in America.

And the christening—that was for a girl, Mary, born December 4th to Jonathan and Mary Ingersoll. Jonathan was red with embarrassment during the ceremony, because having a child after all these years seemed somehow impure.

At the christening, Nat distinguished himself. When the opportunity presented itself, he suddenly slapped

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the baby. He was pounced on by all the females present. They swooped on him in a flurry of agitation.

Later, his father asked Nat why he did it. All Habakkuk could get from him was:

"Slap the baby, make it cry."

As is often the case with words uttered on momentous occasions, they were remembered.

IV

At the age of eleven, on May 17, 1783, Nat was withdrawn from Watson's School and set to work in his father's shop.

Habakkuk had been dismissed by Joshua Phippen because of his lethargy and contemplative habits, which were not only a bad example to the apprentices, but had no real part in the rapid assembling of shook into barrels.

Habakkuk needed Nat's help, and to make the help more pliable, and to take the boy from his books gently, Habakkuk promised that the shop would eventually lead to sea. Hab had not brought the promised parrot from his first voyage to the Indies; and on his subsequent trips it did not appear that the bird survived Hab's memory or the hardships of the passage. Hab would tell his younger brother little about the seafaring life. When at home, he was forever eating. Or, if not eating, he was in a fret to be off with Henry Prince on a shooting expedition.

Nat believed that the immediate path to this special clique of the sea was in the cooper's shop. It seemed to him that sailors were forever talking, but never answering questions. They painted romantic lands,

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queer people, strange ships, but were too important to answer the practical questions of a small boy.

Nat felt he was too puny, physically to stand much chance afloat; but maybe by rolling the big casks down to the pier he would grow as strong as Hab, and have things his own way. That was why he felt no deep regret at leaving his books for a time. To forget everything he had learned and to grow strong like Hab! That was the idea that rested tenaciously in his mind so curiously given to singling down to one aim.

His attraction to his father increased in this new environment. The one silent sailor in the town was his father, and that he never spoke of the sea of his own accord was in itself a mystifying thing. Habakkuk—who had been so many places—you could see by his museum he had been there. This man now worked a draw-knife down oaken staves, and shaped them day after day. He brushed the shavings off his lap and lighted his pipe. Those were the only interruptions in his slow, heavy movements. By the end of the day his reddish beard was yellow with sawdust.

Then a day would come when enough staves had been cut. Nat would scurry about arranging them in piles, with two heads to each pile. Habakkuk would sit on a cask and gesture this way and that with his pipe-stem, spitting when Nat took overlong to find the right staves.

After the floor was covered with these piles, came the exasperating business of "setting up." The staves would be grouped in their circle, and fitted to the base heading. Then Nat would pass a rope noose over the loose staves and draw it tight. Habakkuk ringed the hoops and hammered them home with his mallet.

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Nat would roll the empty barrels down the cobbled street to the wharf. In summer it was hot work. The barrel would go shooting off to one side, Nat's short drum-sticks pegging after it. Then, a moment to catch his breath, and the rumbling course continued to the wharf.

At the dock, Nat would pause and look out over the glittering blue of the bay. If a ship were beating in toward the dock, there would be an anxious knot of people hovering around the bollards, waiting for the sight of a long absent husband or son. And when the flurry of welcome was over, long tackles reached down into the hold to bring up curious bales, silks and teas done up in matting with strangely decorated markings. East India goods, they called them.

Better than listening to sailors' yarns, Nat liked to see this merchandise, or to overhear a piece of commonplace ship's business—the mate talking to the skipper about a skysail boom, both with upturned faces and gesturing arms; or maybe the cook ordering the black boy around the deck to fetch him potatoes from the bin abaft the galley.

These were precious moments, when scraps of ship's business were overheard. It was the real thing! When the ship was at sea, these men talked that way. Nat's eye would rest furtively on the wheel and the binnacle. He would like to touch the spokes of that wheel. To move it back and forth. He wondered whether he would be able to move the wheel. If he asked one of the sailors to let him touch the wheel, the sailor would guffaw and tell him he was a monkey, and it was his business to climb the masts.

Nat would look up at the awful height shrouded in a

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maze of cordage and crossed spars and furled canvas. He was afraid of that. Back to the shop for another barrel he would go. On the run lest Habakkuk berate him for idling. Back to the neat pile of staves and heads, and his father rubbing his beard and gazing with a lazy hopelessness at the amount of work before him.

Sometimes Habakkuk would fall asleep. His head would drop and sway for a moment. Out of his loosened jaws his pipe would fall with a clatter. He would lean back heavily against a cask, and snore.

Nat would go to the wide door of the cooper's shed, and stand against the frame. Out past the fringe of weather-beaten shingled roofs gleamed the shimmering purple and blue of the bay. When the tide was low, the faint breeze would bear up to the boy the aroma of shore—the place of sea-weed, kelp, mussels, fiddler crabs, and snails. Then Nat would be completely transported to a dream world. Always the smell of the exposed margin of the shore—the sea country he knew well—would bear him off in a bark, with every sail bent, shouldering the seas, leaning from the wind, and pressing toward the horizon rim.

Chapter Six

I

THE first snow of winter spread its blue-white shadow over the wharves and shingled roofs of Salem. On the hills the grass had slowly yellowed; and the earth had its hard matted coat of brittle grass tangled in the ice.

The bare arms of the trees cut black against the pale sky when Nat and his father passed up the proud line of the street on their way home after work.

Poverty, with a new grip, again pressed the Bowditch home as this winter of 1783 set in. William and Samuel made new demands on the family budget. They were growing up fast and needed food. If Mary Bowditch stitched ever so late into the night, there were clothes yet wanting for Elizabeth and Mary and Lois. Still, torn dresses could be patched to hold together another month. With Hab away, there were still six children, and the money to buy food was no more than when there were three—perhaps a little less. For Habakkuk had borrowed wherever he could to lay in a larger supply of stave-wood than usual, to cut and steam to shape in the shed during the months when the snow was deep, and fewer ships loaded or needed barrels.

It was also true that while the Salem fleet continued to need barrels, the Crowninshields and the Derbys

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had found it possible to use old barrels, and to employ their crews at re-coopering in such times as their ships lay idle in the doldrums. The burst of trade after the Revolutionary troubles had passed, was now leveling off.

This decrease in the ease with which shooks and barrels might be sold made Habakkuk more readily disposed toward a show of ill temper, with each complaint of his wife—that there was no bread—no money for cloth for Elizabeth's dress—Nathaniel must have pencil and paper—if Nat worked during the day, it was at least his due to be able to figure sums with his mother or Nathan Reed in the evening.

The condition of his family was so far from any possible solution, that whatever worry it might ever have been to Habakkuk was now lightened by the very impossibility of its predicament.

In the kitchen a cold draft of air shot in under the door. The clock ticked from the wall. Time, it seemed, went on. Saturday night, the wooden works would creak wearily, and Habakkuk would rise mechanically to wind them up again.

The idea of the clock going on that way frightened Mary Bowditch at times. She would bend close to the candle, and go on with sewing she had set aside to rest her eyes.

With November came a meager Thanksgiving. Jonathan Ingersoll sent in a turkey and dried yellow corn from Danvers. They lived on the corn as mush, as broth, as cereal, till the windowsills carried high white ledges of December snow.

Nathan Reed, who had read medical books, tried to warn Habakkuk—tried to warn him in time.

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"The body," Reed said, "is just a mechanism, after all. Mechanical process goes on—you can't stop it—one way or another. Unless your wife has more food, she will die."

Habakkuk believed she would not. See what she had done—given birth to seven children, taught them, washed them, made their clothes! And her coughing—well—she had had that now for several years. And nothing happened.

"It's this way," Reed explained. "The lungs purify the blood. The blood gets oxidized. In her sort of phthisis pus slowly gathers in the lungs. Less and less machinery is left to do the work. What is left works faster, faster—to keep up. And then—it gives. The stuff breaks through into the blood-stream. And it's the end in a few days."

"You know more than the doctor," remarked Habakkuk.

"I do," returned Reed sharply; "because the doctor studies pills. I study machinery. I believe I can build a ship some day that will run by steam."

"Eh?" grunted Habakkuk, not at all interested.

"Yes. It's all in making the steam come when you want it, and stop, and come. At college I thought of the human heart, and asked a lot of questions about how it worked."

Nathaniel interrupted. "Mr. Reed," he pleaded, his brow wrinkled tight in a frown; "Mr. Reed."

"Yes, Nat."

"Multiplication is the same as addition, isn't it? Only you add the same numbers."

Reed nodded.

Nat went out of the room quietly, scratching his

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head. Habakkuk gave a sour look at Reed, as if he had infected the child with a poisonous thought. "Multiptyin' and addin' was separate when *I* went to school," he grumbled.

Habakkuk went into the parlor and took down the Bible from the shelf. The children gathered for the evening lesson, while Reed stood in the doorway, slouched against the white frame.

Upstairs, Mary Bowditch was taken with a fit of coughing and choking. Reed left the room, passed into the hall, swung his hand around the newel-post Habakkuk had carved there, and mounted the stairs several steps at a time.

Curious he should remember the swing the newel-post gave him to mount the stair, and strange that the solid, well-placed feel of it under his hand had marked his memory of it, so that he turned at the head of the shallow flight to glance back over his shoulder at it. Mary Bowditch was wracked by another spasm of coughing.

He darted into her room, and put his arm under her shoulders to ease their shaking. Gradually the coughing eased, and Reed held a glass of water to her lips. She sipped it weakly and lay back on her pillow, with her eyes closed. Reed was embarrassed.

"It's beautiful," he muttered, falling back on what had been running as an undercurrent in his mind.

Mary Bowditch opened her eyes questioningly.

"I was thinking out loud," he apologized; "about the stairs, and the newel-post Habakkuk made."

Mary Bowditch smiled. Reed went on talking.

"Do I tire you? I'm upset these days. Trying to figure things out."

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"Nathan, I like to hear you talk. Do go on. I never hear any one talk for whom I have no responsibility. I feel you are free, somehow; and I can rest while you talk."

Reed took the frail hand on the coverlet in his own and held it a moment. Then he dropped it and started pacing the floor. "Look," he said, "at that fantail frame over the front door that Habakkuk made last winter instead of bending staves so that you could eat. I look at it every time I come into the house. It is the most beautiful doorway in Salem. Maybe he can't seem to patch the roof, but think of the stairs he rebuilt, that turn so well for their start at the newel. And that end here—in the hall—so directly, so simply."

"Habakkuk no longer has a ship," murmured Mary Bowditch. She had been having more pain, and her eyes were distant and fixed, her mind now no longer on Reed's words. "You must do this, Nathan. Care for Nat. See that no one ever puts off his questions with lies."

Reed nodded.

"You must go now, Nathan, and carry out the candle with you. I think I am tired."

Reed blew out the candle, and remained standing by the head of her bed for some time in the dark. He knew she did not know he was there. She was in the grip of that curious impersonal force of pain that grooves the mind ahead beyond what surrounds it.

He stepped noiselessly from the room, and down the stairs. When he reached the landing, he saw the children as they listened to Habakkuk's rumbling voice in

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the Old Testament—painfully expanding it in inconsistent platitudes.

Mary looked up at her father as if the Son of Man himself were speaking to her. William looked sleepy and pale. Samuel looked irritably imposed upon in the matter of having to sit still. Elizabeth's face was turned toward Nat, who sat next her. Nat, with serious eyes on his father, was moving the muscles of his face ever so slightly, but exactly in the character of his father when the latter mouthed out a certainty. Possibly Nat was hardly conscious of the mimicking twitches of his face—it lent the grimace but a keener talent.

Nathan Reed put his hand on the small brass door-knob, to swing the door open quietly so that he might go without attracting the attention of the little group in the side parlor. The door gave easily under his pressure, and swung open. It surprised him—the ease, the balance of it. The mechanic in him was instinctive and ever awake. He glanced up at the delicate fantail over the door, and saw how suavely it divided the curved space.

He closed the door softly behind him, and drew his coat tight around his neck against the wild cold of the December wind.

II

On the night of December 16th, Mary Bowditch was taken with a series of spasms that did not seem to end. Nat, who had been awakened by the coughing, was sent through the snow for the doctor. When Dr. Holyoke arrived, the patient was spitting blood; was in a delirium and high fever. So the doctor put leeches on

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her throat to remove the excess, and gave Nat hot bricks to hold at her feet to draw the blood down out of her head, past the leeches. Two days later they buried the dead body in Salem. She was with child.

III

"My mother is dead," repeated Nat. "Dead"—what did it mean? He had heard Nathan Reed mutter that it was an "outrageous sin." Why was it a sin? His mother could not speak to him again. He would never again hear her cough in the night. Habakkuk was silent. He had covered his watch case with black paint.

Everywhere the somber reminder of Death! Black. His sisters cut up their mother's thick black petticoats, and wore them as dresses against the gnawing winter. Elizabeth gave him a scrap of black cambric for a handkerchief. Habakkuk sighed when he wound the creaking wooden works of the clock in the kitchen. In the day, the sunlight glittered on the white snow. But at night, in the house it was black and unnatural—like Dark Day.

Nathan Reed had gone away. To study at Harvard. Nat couldn't cry; it didn't mean anything. It didn't stop the hurt of loneliness in him. There was no one to whom he could show his sums. No one, even, to get pencil and paper for him. Mary managed the house. She ordered Nat on errands.

Subtraction and addition were the same—only reversed—but somehow the same, Nat puzzled. Surely. In each case you put down two numbers and drew a line under them, and in each case they combined into one.

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You went in with two; you came out with one. Yet nothing was lost, the way things were lost in real life. The way his mother was lost. You could always find everything, right there on the paper.

IV

The bark *Light Horse*, Captain Buffington, cleared for St. Petersburg on June 15, 1784. She was the first American ship to clear for that port. She would come back laden with costly furs and articles that maybe "civilized" man had yet to see.

The legend of Peter the Great had penetrated this seafaring colony of the New World. Peter breathed his last in 1725. After this lapse of time, raw incidents from his life flowed into the colonies. As stories about this strange man filtered in, he was assailed from the pulpit. He was godless. Or rather, he had brought images of the old gods from Italy, to place them in his courtyard. The story of the marble Venus had come the long distance. But also came the story of the man as a sailor. Who served as a shipwright in Holland, and later built his navy with his own hands. And founded a city, and brought rich things to it.

So the enterprising Buffington sailed in the bark *Light Horse*, to see what trade in peltry and other articles might be effected with this strange land.

The days before the *Light Horse* sailed found Nathaniel rolling barrel after barrel down to the quayside. Out in the bay the capricious June air held the harbor craft spellbound, barely moving ahead of the light rippled fractures in the smooth glass that lay in their wake. They were small vessels beside this tower-

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ing mass of slender spars and mazed cordage of the *Light Horse*. They moved like small toys set aside carelessly, still rolling faintly from the discarding push. As if they would stop soon, to remain there the whole day.

Nat lingered by the busy wharfside, and gazed innocently at the barnacled piles that stood down into the clear water. But he was listening. He was listening.

"Where is the line to reeve them fore-royal sheets?" a voice cried.

"I don't know," said the man next to him. "I spoke to the skipper about it this morning."

"There he is—I'll ask him. Captain Buffington, sir. We haven't the gear for the fore-royal sheets."

A mild young man with blue eyes and a large frame stepped over the tangled deck to where the two sailors stood, gazing aloft.

"I ordered that at Ropes and Hodges' store this morning. That flop-eared ass of a clerk must have missed it in the list."

One of the sailors looked up at the wharf to see if it might be arriving. But no; the provisions from Ward's store, and the last gear and tackle from Ropes and Hodges'—both had been delivered just before noon mess. It was after five bells now. The sailor's eye fell on Nat.

"Boy!" he cried. "You on the wharf!"

Nat looked up, with eager, intense eyes. He had followed every word of the conversation. Now his heart was beating so that he could not answer.

Captain Buffington made a large wave of his hand, as if dismissing the trouble from his mind. "Send that

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boy for it. I'll give him a shilling if he's back in ten minutes."

Nat had been addressed by the captain of a bark, on important ship's business! A little indirectly, to be sure, but now he felt Buffington's eyes on him, and glowed.

"Well?" growled the captain hoarsely with a portentous rise in his tone. "Jump!"

Nathaniel ran. He ran as if hounds pursued him, clattering down the wharf.

"Who's that boy?" asked Buffington, as he picked up a splice a sailor had been making.

"The cooper's boy. You know, Bowditch."

The men went on with their work.

In a few moments Nat was back, struggling with a large coil of rope down the wharf on a wheelbarrow. He wheeled it to the edge, abreast of the ship and called out in his high shrill voice:

"It's here."

"Toss it down, son," called the skipper.

Nat, out of breath, made a heave at the coil, trying to get it over the vessel's bulwarks.

"Look out—" cried one of the men—"You'll be aboard, yourself, in a moment. Hang on there!"

"I want to," panted Nat.

"Want to what?"

"Ship. Go to sea with this ship."

The sailor laughed. "Captain Buffington, sir. A new hand wants to sign on."

Buffington caught the note of amusement in the sailor's voice, and the high, shrill voice of the boy's excitement.

"What's your name?" he demanded of Nat. A few

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moments of pleasantry at this lad's expense would harm no one—make the long activity of getting ready for sea more jolly.

"Nat Bowditch," came the unsteady reply.

"How old are you?"

"Fourteen," lied Nat.

"Do you know that canvas up there weighs a ton, my boy, when it's wet? And you'd climb aloft to take it in, I reckon, when the ship's rolling so her masts lean far out over the water—hang on—and furl it. Can y' do that?"

Nathaniel nodded.

"It sounds like the drums of hell thundered when the gale catches that sail aback. Got any hair on your chest?"

Nat blushed crimson.

"Can y' lift that coil of rope over the bulwark, now?"

Nat bent and strained. His slight strength could not swing it high enough.

Buffington signed one of the men to take the coil down on deck, and walked aft to where the carpenters were closing up the hatchway. He even forgot the shilling. The sailor remembered, however, after he had the coil on deck—and turned to give the boy a coin from his own pocket.

But Nat was gone.

Nat would not go near the wharf again until the *Light Horse* had let go her hawsers, and the cheering was over. As, one by one, her new white canvas sails fell out against the blue of the sky, and she slipped away from the dock on the favoring tide, Nat watched her with bitter longing—till she was hull down, her cloud of canvas a dull blur on the horizon.

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In his heart, as he stood there by the quayside was a sudden black panic like the terror of Dark Day. Like a spell of sickening dizziness he felt his body swaying, his hands unaccountably cold and numb. As his eyes cleared, and he could see again the unmarred sweep of the horizon, he thought of the room at the Derby's, the mantel with the spheres on it, the curious coral, the interlaced anchors and sea-serpents carved in the wood. That house was a souvenir of distant ports, ports he would never see, strange old harbors he would never enter—harbors centuries older than Salem, with strange craft at anchor in them, men talking strange languages on those foreign quays.

He glanced quickly behind him.

He was alone on the dock. The others had gone.

He let the sob burn upward in his throat for one wild moment. Then he turned, and walked slowly and unsteadily back toward the cooperage shed. The fixed idea returned to him. Somehow, by his skill at numbers he must get to sea. Through the counting house? As a supercargo? Perhaps.

As he left the margin of the bay, its salty odor followed him.

At low tide the streets of Salem were filled with the smell of the sea.

III

SALEM: A DOVE HAS SUCKLED A SERPENT



Chapter Seven

I

ONE year of Nat's apprenticeship at the cooper's trade satisfied Habakkuk that his son was cut out for a mercantile career. A few preparatory months at Michael Walsh's bookkeeping school would be expedient.

But to Nat, duly installed under Walsh's tutelage, it seemed less and less plausible that these figures which rolled from Walsh's Gaelic tongue were designed merely as a means to count money. This Walsh, but lately out of Tipperary, talked of everything in glamorous figures.

Down by the waterfront, hard by General Fiske's old house, stood the ship-chandlery store of Ropes and Hodges. It was here that Nat soon found himself, instead of listening to Walsh. Walsh might write a famous arithmetic that was to school the merchant emperors of the next generation; but he drank James River whisky with Habakkuk only once at the tavern, and the next day found himself lacking a scholar.

Habakkuk in his simple way, wanted his son to get ahead. Scratching his red beard, Habakkuk reflected, and saw no reason why, with his taste for figures, Nat should not equal a Crowninshield. And the older Crowninshield had placed his son Ben, about Nat's age, as an apprentice in the Crowninshield stores. It was

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easy to see this Walsh was but a frivolous fellow, the way he drank his whisky. Habakkuk had no mind to trifle with his son's career. He had no mind to cooer barrels all his own life, either. He would readily accept a son's bounty in his old age.

Nat was reluctant to give up contact with learning; but, through intercession of the Reverend John Prince, Jonathan Hodges, Nat's direct employer, encouraged the boy to use any spare moments in the store at his books and figuring. Salem had a fine middle-class respect for learning, as long as it did not interfere with anything important. It was proper to encourage it, just as it was proper to acquire bulky theological tracts and cyclopedias.

At home, with his mother dead, Nat found life not so easily managed. Habakkuk, when frequently there was no money to supply him at the tavern, would indulge in periods of melancholy mutterings; talking to himself; describing a mermaid he had once seen off Madeira. These ghostly monologues kept all the half-dozen hungry children in the house on a nervous tension, in which Nat found little peace for quiet hours of ciphering. He wore thin in his longing to rescue these interrupted hours from waste. And so, when Jonathan Hodges—a distant cousin through the Ingersolls—offered Nat an attic room in his house, Nat was quick to accept his employer's offer.

Old Dame Bowditch died in May, muttering blasphemous imprecations on the good doctor who bled her through her last sinking spell. Even if allowances were made for her delirium, here was surely a witch-woman who howled against a Christian burial. To her last hour she was concerned about the Indians.

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Habakkuk was glad enough to see her buried safely in the Turner tomb, rather than in the Bowditch plot. He feared her disturbing influence among the skeletons that he, one day, would join. Full of omens and superstitions, Habakkuk was a depressing companion after dark.

Nat was glad to be at the Hodges' home free from this new trend of his father's conversation, free from all disturbing influences. The care of the little Hodges absorbed all the older Hodges' parental energy. Only when Mary and Elizabeth Boardman came to visit, was Nat prodded into contact with his cousins and their starched linen frocks. These daughters of Captain Francis Boardman were frequent guests in the Hodges home, and their visits were ever a signal for the elders to enjoy Nat's awkward, self-conscious manners in their company.

Then, sometimes Mary and Elizabeth would come into the store to buy scupper nails for their father; but at these times, Nat had more self-command. He was not a social clown here, but a responsible clerk; and he quickly retreated to that position to observe the vivacious pair curiously, with secret glances from behind his counter desk.

In this first year of Nat's life at the Hodges', Elias Derby announced that his ship *Grand Turk* would sail on the first New England voyage to China and India by way of the Cape of Good Hope and Java Head.

Little Elizabeth Boardman boasted one day in the store, before a group of sea-faring men, that she would only marry a man who would undertake a fine adventure like that of the *Grand Turk*! It did not rankle in Nat's mind, or kindle the ambition already thwarted

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by Buffington's long-ago remark, that puny arms could not deal with canvas whipped by a typhoon. Rolling barrels had not increased the circumference of Nat's biceps.

Nat felt now that his gift was the gift of the thoughtful man, and that his way would somehow go on by the truth of figures alone. To his young intense mind, the future became heroic, the chatter of a little girl meant nothing to him in face of the vast laws he was slowly gaining the means to contemplate. The glories of the Indies would pale before the panorama of the definite universe that he, some day, would measure! Nat knew he could master the ciphers, and so he did not listen to Elizabeth Boardman, or her sister Mary. He shut his ears to their laughter when they visited the Hodges.

II

Imagine the surprise of Nat—and of Salem—when Elias Derby announced the captain of the *Grand Turk* as Jonathan Ingersoll. Hodges was told by Derby that Jonathan had applied to him for a command, and Derby had the inspiration to give him the *Grand Turk*. "It will take just the cussedness of a Jonathan Ingersoll not only to get a ship that far, but to deal with the Dutch when he gets there," Elias was reported as having said.

Whatever revolutions of prejudice might have accounted for Jonathan's reversal—back to the sea—certainly the sense of gain was in the foreground. Once rebuked by Derby for too independent action, it had taken these years of farming to bring the moody Jonathan to swallow his pride.

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And so, in November 1784, Jonathan piloted the *Grand Turk* out of Salem Harbor with a cargo of rum, oil, tar, pork, beef, and cheese. Besides a strong box of ten thousand Spanish dollars, her cargo stood nearly six thousand pounds.

The course of events once more proved Jonathan's independence. Not only did he reach the Cape of Good Hope, but made his way back to Salem touching at Granada, St. Helena, and the West Indies. He sold his cargo with well over one hundred percent profit in New York instead of Salem, and returned, not only enriching Elias Derby, but also himself by his "cussedness."

On his return the soil again claimed him. It was easier for Jonathan to endure the rigors of farming with all the gold he had tight in a canvas sack. He complained less about the evils of the sea.

As for Nat, he realized his uncle's character too well to feel that the new Ingersoll wealth had any meaning for him.

III

Before the end of his second year in Ropes and Hodges' store, Nat had read through the four bulky volumes of Chambers Cyclopedia. The item on barometers interested him deeply; and in his spare moments, he constructed a barometer for himself. It was a bewildering idea, this thought of atmospheric pressure—that the air pressed down on mercury with a force that would cause a column of it to rise in a vacuum tube, and to remain supported!

After Nat made his barometer, his employer grew rather proud of the thought that he was sheltering a

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genius, and Jonathan Hodges was an easy boaster. This made life run smoothly for Nat until one unfortunate day a customer came in to settle the division of a plot of land.

"Look," said Hodges, with a gesture toward Nat; "look at that boy—always figuring at something."

It so happened that Ben Crowninshield, who had come in on an imaginary errand, was reading the results of the Charlestown lottery in another corner of the store.

The customer pursed his lips, looked from one boy to the other. "Ah," he sighed piously, "Hogarth's apprentices! An ounce of diligence multiplies the little moments into pounds of things done. Ah, me! It is an example, veritably an example."

Hodges was called from the store, and the customer approached Nat, who was in the midst of a column of figures that would give him the proportion to which the barometer might be scaled, and asked him for a pair of hinges. Nat absently handed out the hinges and went back to his figures. The proportion he was developing was feverishly important, immediately necessary.

When the customer returned in a day or two to renew his argument about the division of land, he began by paying Hodges for the hinges. Hodges was less enthusiastic about Nat's absorption in his studies, when he found the tally showed no record of the sale.

Nat, however, was not without shrewdness. He offered to survey the irregularly shaped plot of land, and to find a way to divide it equally.

This he proceeded to do with much precision. Hodges was so well pleased with the accuracy of the result, that he forgave Nat for his oversight in regard

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to the hinges. The other disputant was not so well pleased, and asserted that Nat had made the division favorable to his employer.

A more celebrated surveyor was called in, whose calculations gave Hodges even more land than Nat's—until Nat pointed out an error in the figures, whereupon both results coincided.

IV

People in Salem thought this feat amazing—in a boy of thirteen, and began to nod their heads toward him. He assumed in their eyes a character freakish, wizardlike, fabulous.

Ben Crowninshield indulged in prophecy. "Father," he said, "one of these days Nat will be an almanac-maker."

One of these days was not so distant. In 1788 Nat made a complete almanac for 1790, in which astronomical and tidal detail were quite minute and perfect.

Shortly after the survey he made for Hodges, an unusual good fortune made its way to him.

Although figuring was Nat's passion, books were, after all, at the center of his need. Two clerics of Salem—John Prince, for his enlightenment, and Thomas Bentley because the Bowditches had been of his congregation—rarely passed the store of Ropes and Hodges without pushing open the Dutch door and looking for Nat where he had his pine desk at the far end of the long counter. From time to time they brought him a book, and Hodges had kindly opened to him the library of Judge Ropes. To this privilege he owed his beloved Chambers Cyclopaedia.

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Salem boasted, however, a scientific library that ranked second only to the library at Philadelphia, and this was now made accessible to Nat in 1786 through the good offices of Prince and Bentley.

This so-called "Philosophical Library" had a curious origin. While the war of the Revolution was in progress, the Irish scientist, Richard Kirwan, had caused his most valuable books to be shipped from Ireland to England. In the course of the voyage, the vessel was captured by a Beverly privateer, and the books were brought to Beverly. Here they were sold at auction to a group in Salem, who called themselves the Philosophical Association, and later became the Salem Athenæum.

Suddenly, Nat found himself placed—and without prejudice to his beloved Chambers Cyclopædia—in the midst of authoritative and original sources in science. The important books of Europe were at his hand.

He always kept one or two of these books with him, and spent every evening copying out by hand into notebooks all the items he wanted for future reference and record. Sometimes he remained in the store until nine or ten, making his own library painstakingly with a quill pen; at other times, he would go directly to his room in the attic and work far into the night over his papers in the uncertain illumination of his rushlight.

Among the chief treasures he found in the library thus opened to him were the prolix "Transactions" of the Royal Society of London. Into his notebooks he transcribed all the mathematical papers and many of the scientific articles. These filled in the end, more than twenty manuscript volumes. Among their contents were Emerson's "Mechanics," Gravesande and Mar-

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tyn's "Philosophical Treatise," extracts from Bernoulli, the "Memoirs" of the Paris Academy. . . .

Nat's mind was a slowly forming peak—rising ever above the dark meadows of the world, and leaning more and more toward them by the very convexity of its rapid and abnormal growth.

Nathan Reed, who had left Salem shortly after Mary Bowditch died, returned in 1788, to be surprised, and not a little shocked, by the intensity that had come into Nat's eyes. In it he saw the making of a personality. He sensed in Nat an inner intensity that would make him a direct and compelling force.

Reed had been studying again at Harvard during these years of his absence, and his own advance in science enabled him to value the character such a force as Nat might give to scientific progress. While Reed had tutored and read at Harvard, his interests had remained mechanical, as they always had been. A few months in Salem as assistant to Dr. Holyoke turned him sharply from this more directly humane aspect of science into chemistry and purely mechanical experiment.

Impulsive and generous, and excited about the forces that he could stir in Nat's mind, Reed opened his considerable library to Mary Bowditch's son. When Reed started an apothecary shop, it was a social pretense to cover the industries that were carried on in its back room. Here, where Reed worked on his steamboat, was a place for Nat to come and build celestial spheres of wood and models of the planetary systems in paper.

Sunday evenings, when Nat was engaged in this work, Reed experimented with his model steamboat. Talk and laughter lightened the care with which these two went on with their work, and time was found in

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which Reed taught Nat to play the flute. In his frequent indolent moments Reed was an adept musician, though music, at that time, usually connoted indulgence in ardent liquors.

"Nathaniel," Reed remarked one evening; "this flute will be of great assistance to you when you come to make love."

Making love. In Salem it was not so simple. Salem was no longer a simple, primitive colony. Various, in subtle ways, Salem had changed in these years of Nat's isolation and preoccupation with the things that were going on within him. Nat was blind to Salem.

What would happen, Reed wondered, when over the empty stream-beds of Nat's emotions a sudden flood of passion flowed? He was so curiously intense, he took things so deeply, he was so utterly unaware of Salem!

Chapter Eight

I

AND of Salem?

Reed's careful mind often pondered the changes.

Elias Hasket Derby, at fifty-five, was the richest man in the United States. While his apoplectic father, Richard, with what had then been a folly, a truly droll extension of trade, had made his commerce with the English and French West Indies thrive, the son, Elias, had taken the globe for his sailing chart. There was no limit for his ever-growing fleet.

Elias in particular had penetrated the special territory Salem was to make her own. Boston reached the East by the Horn. Derby sought to make Salem's access by the Cape of Good Hope, Sumatra, Java. Elias Derby in ten years had proved his cause, and Salem's, by becoming the richest man in the United States. The richest man—you could see it in his walk. He walked down to the counting-house by the wharf, as his father had walked. And the town looked at him as they had regarded his father—only then it had all seemed like a play, a fiction.

Something new was coming into the phrase "United States." Quite possibly, these years had seen no vivid "revolution." Just years of uncertain struggle—growing out of a quarrel with a distant careless England,

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about debts and taxes. But in the time that drifted both Elias and Nathaniel to their spheres, the phrase, "United States," had come to have real importance. Citizen Gênet—Lafayette's visit. It tended to raise the respect of a nation to be besought for help, as now by France. The difficulties that arose from the French plea took on the shape of a quarrel about a national attitude. Almost the first national quarrel, because its appeal was popular and the divisions formed about social levels—the mob that favored France, the aristocracy that saw its advantage in playing safe. Here was a truly national matter, not one about the more familiar rivalries of individual states.

There were those who were flattered by the request of Citizen Gênet—the simpler ones, whom Jefferson counted on. And there were those who saw no flattery in being asked to join an intoxicated, witless mob. These clung to the mannered tradition of General Washington as to an oriflamme, and believed Gênet presumptuous and unthoughtful. In truth, an incoherent country was beginning to talk about itself as a unit, as it might not have done without a division that ran horizontally. The United States was more in men's minds as singular rather than plural noun.

The far-away voyage of the *Light Horse* had succeeded. May of 1786, the following year, had seen the *Grand Turk*, a Derby ship under Captain West, make the first New England voyage to India and China by the Cape of Good Hope. The *Grand Turk* had returned in May two years later, 1787, with news and riches that established a deep determination in Elias Derby to make that route to the East the way of Salem. But it was not until 1789 that he succeeded in sending

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the *Astrea* on the first direct trip to Canton. Tea and silk. He was concentrating. In October of that year, a southern aristocrat, the finest flower of Federalism, visited Salem. General Washington! And Derby welcomed him.

Elias Derby still believed in one central power that was sovereign. It was only three years after the General's visit that the first bank opened its doors in Salem. Derby was crystallizing a theory.

Elias Derby carried a smart silver-headed walking stick, with a leather thong for his wrist. The center of the new world was where the point of that stick touched the earth.

II

Unlike Nat's growth, the advance made by the Crowninshields, the Derbys, the Peabodys—the mercantile expansion—was like a statue cut day by day in the public square, each feature taking its character from formless marble under the visible iron and mallet of the sculptor in view of all.

The new Salem was plain to see. Going down Paved Street, the least tutored observer could witness the cosmopolitan airs the gentlemen used to bring a pinch of Elliot's snuff to their powdered noses. Perhaps the snuff was but a small diversion for a mind that would shortly be reckoning profits of a Canton voyage in the counting-house. Perhaps the gesture was an aperitif to placing these earnings in the Lancaster, Charlestown, or Williamstown Free School lottery.

And here was John Appleton's store—quite branched out from its old meager quarters—displaying fustians, now, and satinets. Goods from London, Canton, Bom-

bay. These things would reassure a persistent farmer such as Jonathan Ingersoll in only one way—the devil had nourished those who had crept to his cloak. Indeed, Jonathan's naturally sulphurous imaginings must be put to it to contrive a smiting blow that would carry it all away, knock the dollars from out the brass-bound teak chests of Salem and extinguish the many bawdy gills of her women. Well might he and his wife Mary cherish their eight-year-old daughter, and promise themselves that she should never be touched by these things of hell.

And at the Sun Tavern, where Medford rum had reigned of old, the gentry were now tasting wines—Madeira, sherry, Cape, claret, and Malaga. In Court Street strange Eastern spices could be bought from Deland, by simply laying money on the counter. And camphorwood chests might be had to hold the daintier frocks, and to give them the faint aroma of mysterious China, which there were many to recognize—many to whom the scent brought up the sight of Eastern women, shadowy Mongolian faces, and queer asthmatic language in minor key.

It was easy for David West to publish "Advice from a Lady of Quality to her Children," in a town settled by pilgrims now grown rich and reminded once more, but in a different light, of the civilizations they had left, of old manners, and of a life with some artifice and resource. And it was not strange that David West's profitable author should achieve anonymity through the device "By a Lady of the French Nobility." To the people of this town of Salem, every excellence was French, in which they doubtless agreed with the immortal Gallic soul.

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In fact, the democratic experiments of France were receiving notice as well as advice from Salem's people. The proceedings of the young parliament at Paris were more fully given in the columns of the *Gazette* than the more domestic achievements at Philadelphia.

III

If this preening dove of Salem, that was beginning to hold the commerce of the world upon the broad bosom of her bay, had suckled a serpent, no one, except possibly Reed, was aware of it. Nat was living his life as one might read a simple story. The intensity that might accumulate out of so long and steady a focus was unthought of, unseen. Nat's life went on simply, a life of very simple facts, but facts all keyed to the forwarding of Nat's fixed idea.

Over the doorway of the store of Ropes and Hodges, where Nat still earned his daily bread, now appeared the name of Ward. The path to the new proprietor's succession was through his wife, who had been Jane Ropes, and by the retirement of Hodges. Nat remained undisturbed by these changes, and continued his apprenticeship. Only, now it was "Ward's Store."

While Francis Cabot sold corduroys, ribdelures, stockinets, thicksets, fresh Hyson tea, and a general line of East India merchandise, the things to be sold at Ward's were as definitely unromantic as ever. In January, an assortment of brads, nails, bar and sheet lead, was the only unusual feature in the ordinary run of ship's stores—hardwares, rigging, and pork in brine.

Nat found little interest in the growing competition

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of Lee and Cabot's store in Beverly. Lee and Cabot sold salt, bolt-rope, Spanish and Russian iron especially, and their grades of Russia and Ravens canvas were superior. However, you had to come to Ward's for nails and brads. And Nat's fingers were sore and bleeding from counting out the nails. Each nail, forged by hand, when it was new had sharp cutting edges.

Nat was idly meditating whether he might not ask Nathan Reed if there could not be a machine made that would cut the nails out, cut them clean, and make them less expensively, when through the door of the shop came Ben Crowninshield.

Ben carried a handful of broadsides. By delivering these advertisements he was earning a shilling to pay for a supply of Gibraltar candy.

"You'll be interested in this, Nat," Ben called out maliciously.

Nat walked over and picked up one of the sheets.

"W. P. Greenwood
Surgeon Dentist"

he read. Puzzled, he looked farther down.

"Teeth are by far the most brilliant natural ornaments that can be exposed to view—at Jonathan Webb's, by the church this spring—"

"Old Saw-tooth's coming by this spring, Nat. Too bad you'll have to wait till then!" Ben laughed.

In hurried confusion, Nat tried to cover his teeth with his lips.

"You ought to go with us to-night, Nat," Ben went on, "to see Mr. Bennet, the American balance master.

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Mary and Elizabeth Boardman are going to get their family to go."

Nat's face was unmoved by this.

"But you ought to read about the American balance master. It's all in yesterday's *Gazette*." Ben walked quickly to the counter and picked up the paper, then glanced up for a moment. "Your friend Nathan Reed will be there, because Elizabeth Jeffry is going. Elizabeth and Mr. Reed go to everything. Why is it you never go anywhere?"

Nat, trying to remain silent, was secretly not a little shaken inside by this defection of his friend to the feminine ranks.

"Listen," Ben said, as he read of the forthcoming wonders from the paper: "The American balance master, Mr. Bennet, performs blindfold over 13 glasses of wine . . . feats of the tight wire . . . dances a hornpipe on his head, dances crabwalking on his hams without the assistance of his body touching the floor—"

Nat broke in with, "American balance master be damned!"

IV

In a practical way, Reed was the verification of Nat's own hopes. Reed had explained away so much of the charms of Paved Street; Reed had kept out the intrusive political talk; Reed had shown Nat what would seem to be not worthy of demonstration, that a simpering laugh was only a bid for favor from a girl—not an unattainable height of masculine aspiration; Reed had said that any girl could be had for the asking, and what was that beside science? Reed had supplied an easy

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contempt for what Nat might have found very difficult to deny under other circumstances.

It was Reed, too, who had warned Nat against the religious fervors latent in Christian breasts, and had bade him beware of exciting them; had shown him that while Servetus, Bruno, and Galileo, for instance, had projected no atheism, two were burned and the third forced to a degrading recantation, because the views they held in science were taken as assaults on the Bible. And was not this Elizabeth Jeffry a leader in the junior Female Society of Christ? And, on thinking it over, had she not simpered very effectively?

For confirmation of this last, Nat had only to reflect on the first trial trip of Reed's steamboat, the year before. Ah, that great day had been a success for Reed—until he had returned to the shore with his smoking monster, and heard the laughter there! Laughter of Elias Derby; laughter, too, of Elizabeth Jeffry. Elizabeth had put her small handkerchief to her nose.

Nat remembered how in the work-shop, the night after, Reed brushed aside his models with a cry that was like a sob, and had stalked out into the night. At the time, Nat had put this down to his great disappointment at the failure of his creature to live up to its mechanical reasonableness on a large scale, and actually in the water. He had felt hot tears in his own eyes that night.

But now, in the light of Reed's increasing devotion to Elizabeth Jeffry—evident enough for Ben Crown-inshield to couple their names naturally—did it not seem that a woman's laugh had been at the bottom of Reed's anguished gesture? Was not her smile, her

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little laughter at Reed's work, so placed that she might become thereby more eminently desirable?

As Nat squirmed on his stool at the thought of Reed's defection, the sudden irony came to him that these two were going to observe the antics of a man who could "dance blindfold over thirteen glasses of wine," in the phrase of the broadside.

It was perhaps fortunate that, not many days after this acrobat passed through the town, Nat had received from the Rev. Mr. Bentley's kind hand a copy of Newton's "*Principia*." Nat had read so much about the work in the memoirs he had studied, that it was a joy to dig at the actual tough Latin words of its prose. It healed the wound in him of Reed's increasing absence from the work-shop—at least in a measure.

Nat's Sunday evenings soon became increasingly given to digging at the gnarled roots of Newton's classic. The intensification of his own work was the thing that enabled him to hold the sail he was carrying, and to rationalize the withdrawn support of Reed.

V

But Nat needed simple companionship, and missed the sense he used to have of Reed's presence and ready reply and affectionate laughter that sped along the evenings of the past.

Accordingly he turned to the one person alive for whom in his early life he had a deep attachment—his sister Elizabeth. Through the spring of 1790 he walked with her on Sunday afternoons. Elizabeth was happy with her brother as she was with no one else; she was slight, with wide, fine eyes that glowed as

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Nat told her of his discoveries. Elizabeth, at eighteen, had a fragile, impermanent beauty that awoke only under the subtle touch of response. All her life underfed and ill-clothed, the marks of a difficult life were on her. With Nat, talking about the spheres, these signs seemed to drift away; and the strain that life had made and continued in her relaxed, and left her spirit free.

On Sundays, these two would walk together to Danvers, with gay, excited talk between them. Over the meadows sometimes, instead of by the road—the meadows where Elizabeth had found Nat dazed on Dark Day, so long ago.

In October of 1790, the inevitable happened to Nathan Reed. He married Elizabeth Jeffry. They would live prosperously in Salem; for Reed had cast aside the models of his steamboat, and had developed a machine for the manufacture of nails. The day before he was married, he sent Nat his flute.

VI

David Martin, a young shipmaster, presented Nat with a copy of "Euclid" in the spring of 1791. Martin did not understand it, but valued it because he had received it from a noted wag, who had found it in Cambridge.

Nat's Sunday visits to see Elizabeth had brought him back closer to his family. His oldest sister, Mary, had persisted in her efficient care of the children during the years Nat had lived with the Hodges. It was David Martin's interest in Mary that had led him to

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present Nat with the "Euclid." Suddenly, in April, he married her.

Nat's dry comment was: "At last Mary will have children of her own to manage."

Although Martin seemed frail and rather consumptive, Mary was radiant for the future.

Nat thought of this union as an obviously happy and desirable thing. It involved no such sacrifice as in Reed's case. Here something was gained. Mary would have a real, if unsubtle, love, and the children of her own she had always so deeply needed. Reed had given up the solitary hours that alone seemed able to hatch out the mechanical dream of his life. Any attachment limited to just the small interests of one other person's daily life, seemed to Nat impossible to understand. It was such a waste! It renewed in him the idea that time must not slip by him fruitlessly.

Shortly after Mary's marriage, Nat undertook to learn French from a Parisian named Jordy, who was then temporarily resident in Salem. In exchange, Nat taught Jordy English. This arrangement continued for sixteen months. So many of the papers in Kirwan's books had been written in French, that Nat saw clearly he must master that language before he could take in the whole sweep of current mathematical and scientific knowledge. And now, at the age of eighteen, Nat's library had grown to nearly two thousand pages in his own handwriting.

With Mary married, although she continued to live with the other children, there was naturally a sense of separation. Samuel and Lois, the youngest, felt it most. Samuel turned naturally to Elizabeth, and through Elizabeth to Nat.

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Samuel had been the most wayward and eccentric of the children. People called him queer; but Nat was quick to recognize what might be a mathematical gift, and fostered it. He gave Samuel books to read, and was surprised at the alternate brilliance and stupidity of his answers. The dull spots Nat put down to the boy's frail health. Much of the time he was sick, and coughed. Nat would shudder when he heard the familiar racking cough, and thought of his mother—of himself. He began to avoid Samuel.

VII

As the sunlight paled to winter evening, on December 9, 1791, Nat trudged from the lower part of town, where Ward's store was, up to where his family lived. He had several books under his arm that he was bringing to Samuel. It was a cold day. Old Habakkuk would surely be at the Sun Tavern, drinking Medford rum or corn whisky from the James River. Elizabeth would be at home, in the kitchen; and David Martin and Mary together by the fire.

Or maybe Elizabeth would be upstairs, leaving Martin and Mary alone.

Nat came in front of the house. There was Elizabeth at the upstairs window. He waved, and Elizabeth nodded. Her face left the window.

She would meet him in the hall, thought Nat, as he mounted the steps. Behind the door there was a sudden piercing scream of sharp pain.

Then silence, a few low moans. Nat furiously tore at the latch on the door. Before he got it open, he

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knew what had happened. Elizabeth had tripped and fallen down the stair in her eagerness to meet him.

His hand shook so that he could hardly hold the knob of the door. At last he got it open. And there was Elizabeth, in a white dress, writhing on the floor. A stain of scarlet was on the white. Nat stood anchored to the floor. The door was open and swinging behind him. He covered his face with his hands. Suddenly, he crouched to the floor beside Elizabeth, as if he had been cut in two at the stomach. Then he crawled from her, and left the house with a cry from his throat that was like the sound she made.

Elizabeth lived on for two days in agony, and then died, with a peaceful, secure, and understanding smile on her drawn face.

Nat had been unable to see her again. His shrinking from the reality of pain and the horrible was automatic. No amount of love, pride, or concern seemed able to control it. Now, as upon other occasions that were to come in his life, his action seemed without natural feeling, cold, in the simple record.

Books were the only refuge. His refusal to see Elizabeth had caused comment by neighbors, by the family. It served only to drive Nat deeper into his work. The piety of their grief gave it a false note that made Nat wrinkle his face when he thought of their bowed heads. Their devout phrases seemed smug, superior, self-satisfied. Their faces suggested an unconscious pleasure in acting a part.

Nat turned to his books, solitary. Great love and great sorrow were not duties or even parts there was pleasure in acting. They were emotions—sacred, intimate feelings—or they were nothing.

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It was several months before Nat was able to concentrate again on his work. Something that he had come to depend on was gone from inside him.

VIII

David Martin died of consumption in 1793, and the same disease gathered in Samuel in April of the following year. These things did not cut Nat. A son was born to his employer, Ward, the same year. What of it? Birth and death no longer connected with Nat, because his life was learning, and learning did not seem to know birth or death, seemed even to be without history—a continuous “present,” in that anything that had ever been true, could be proved out of the present.

Nat was filled with strange longings. It comforted him somewhat to look out over the blue bay in summer, and to see the ships there. To listen to the talk at the wharves, as he had done when he was a cooper’s apprentice, made an attack of faintness or dizziness pass. Perhaps, if he went to sea, it would all mend; these spells of dizziness and faintness would leave him, and life again return to an even flow. When life troubled them, all other young men of Salem went to sea.

Chapter Nine

I

FACTS go on in life until you suddenly pause in wonder—how did this happen? For instance, at twenty-one Nathaniel Bowditch had probably the most creative and best informed mathematical mind in America.

His hair was prematurely gray; he walked with a slight stoop; and his eyes burned like small coals in their sockets, an unquiet and constant fire was in their restless, traveling search. His large ears, like those of his father, Habakkuk, stood out from the wide arch of his skull—stood out in almost comic relief, so droll and donkey-like did they appear. If Habakkuk was a man of vehement word but shrewd instinct to select the easiest way, his son's word was no less vehement, for all its placing in the higher range of the voice—a key that shrilled when he was excited. But there was no suggestion of the easiest way in Nat; no comfortable body such as Habakkuk's, but a thin, taut skin that covered long bones and nervous muscles given to impetuous gestures.

And yet there was a strange vitality that could feed this mind with fire. You felt, to look at him, that this little fellow could run on his own steam.

All that energy had been focused on one central aim, one swelling idea. Nat's idea was that the sole de-

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pendence of human life lay in numbers; that they were the bricks of all reason; and that their combinations constituted the architecture of all thought, the test of every statement. Nay, more, that they were the creators—these small black symbols—of every “new” idea, the inevitable mark of every value that was real and not imaginary.

As an arrangement of stones might rise up into the air in a design of architecture, so to Nat were the possibilities of figures. There was the guiding principle that was true to a universal law; there was the special private will that made a formula. Figures to him were symbols by which the soul might speak accurately, in an accuracy that had no visible summit of glory to make it prosaic, self-bored, and un-mysterious. . . .

And all this in a Salem that held the trade of the new world on the table of its bay, that solved all questions by force, that parried all importunings of cosmic reason by prayer—a Salem that was so sure of itself as the center of the New World, so sure of the ships it made and their absolute design that, in extending trade to new waters, different ships were not made, but more ships of the same kind built. The southwest wind had not blown down Essex Street for so many years that it could not still remember, and carry in its murmur, the aroma of burning flesh of the dissenting minds of another generation, those deluded dissenters who were driven into witchcraft, and thence against a well-seasoned hickory stake.

Nat dwelt an unmolested citizen for two reasons: Salem was not aware of what he meant; and Nat had not yet struck out with any meaning of his own that

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touched the immediate concerns of the town. Could any part of Salem's morality, Salem's religion, Salem's navigation, Salem's wealth, forever elude the swelling purpose that was in Nat? And could Nat forever elude the sudden chance that all his great force and vitality might meet a sudden diversion into the narrow and neglected stream-beds of his emotions?

II

When Webber, the most distinguished mathematical authority in America at the time, received a communication from Bowditch proving an error in Newton's immortal "Principia," he brushed it aside without thinking to reply to so absurd a challenge. Webber had his name to back him up. Nat, on his side, had precisely two thousand three hundred pages in the fine script of his own hand—a library of twelve folio and fourteen quarto volumes, that he had made for himself, that contained the rigid system of his own mathematical certainty up to its present point. Nat did not hesitate to defy a calculation of the immortal Newton, and he did not regard Webber's silence as anything but the silence of defeat. Perhaps if a time should come when he might defy the less immortal Salem through the medium of one of her less academic citizens, there might be more chance for a spark to leap.

There was one occasion that had perilously avoided electric discharge. For all his taut body, the grim detail of life could defeat Nat into utter silence and a terror as enveloping and inescapable as the terror of Dark Day. It was this terror that had destroyed what

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his mind was beginning to form, and reserved its striking force for another occasion. Terror had put him to rout.

Nat liked to walk out East Neck, obscurely conscious of receiving some simplification from the sea, from the mark of the tides on the beach, from the unending movement of the chainless ocean. He liked to walk down the beach in the early morning and to let the vigorous strivings of his calculations of the night return to his mind gently, like an incident in life which, remembered, writes its own poetry. He could return to his day's work behind the ancient counter of Ropes and Hodges' with his subconscious mind appeased and assured. Nat relished these walks down the beach.

There was a ledge, one of the several ugly rocks lying off shore, called the Londoner. It lay about a mile southeast of Thatcher's Island Light, and it was here that the schooner *Nabby* was wrecked in a gale one March. All hands had gone down with her.

It was natural that on the following day a store dealing in ship-chandlery and hardware should be a center of gossip respecting her loss. Nat heard the elder Crowninshield remark that the *Nabby's* master, Tom Stevens, was a notably successful navigator. He went by the smell of his sounding lead, and gauged his distances truer than any other sailor out of Salem—he could make a guess that was sharper than the most minute figures.

Crowninshield did not stop there. He went on to say that Ben Carraway had probably lost the vessel while Tom slept. Tom's nose would never have been fooled. Doubtless it was some of Ben's idle figuring that had cast them up.

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Nat said nothing from his stool at the far end of the counter. He was figuring there the proportions to which he was going to scale an experimental barometer of his own design. He sensed a veiled insult at his precious mathematics, but it was too far removed from the figures on his slate to carry force. He had heard John Gibaut say that Tom Stevens' fingers had been clutched tight over the wheel spokes when he was taken off in a dory, the only man recovered. The wreck was distinctly due to the relative dependability of Tom's nose and Ben's crude figures. But Nat did not challenge. What did it matter if a schooner was wrecked and a load of whisky from the James River leaked out into the unappreciative waters of the bay? A few dollars' loss was an entry in the ledger.

Several days after this, Nat was walking down the beach in the early morning. Curiously, his mind reverted to the wreck of the schooner, perhaps because the auction of chain and rigging that had been salvaged from her was advertised for that afternoon. Gradually into the unseeing gaze of Nat's eyes out over the gray water, there floated a dark, elongated object that drifted in with the tide like a pliant log, a piece of wreckage. Suddenly Nat's eyes became riveted in quick attention. It was a dead body, floating in toward the beach.

Each wave carried its lifeless weight nearer to where he stood. Nat stood silent, his mouth open, his eyes horribly fascinated as, with each roll of the corpse, he distinguished a new swollen detail—a blackened, horrible caricature. Involuntarily Nat stepped out a few paces into the cold water, as the body continued its gentle drift toward him. Its stiff arms seemed to appeal to him for help.

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Suddenly a wave carried the body against his leg. The impact turned its shoulder, the head rolled up, seemed to stare directly at Nat. The face of Ben Caraway! The eyes were loose, the scalp separated from the skull in places. Nat shrank back, his heart pounding in his throat. The body rolled face down again, and struck against the pebbles of the beach.

With a shrill cry Nat gained the sand, and ran. Ran as hard as he could. In the wild and desperate footprints of his escape were lost any wish ever to regain that image of the drowned man; and any chance recollection of Crowninshield's bland statement vanished likewise in the quick-spurned sand beneath his running feet.

III

In 1794 the State legislature ordered that each town be accurately surveyed and its exact area calculated. The selectmen of Salem appointed the Rev. John Prince and John Gibaut to do the work. Gibaut was a sea-captain whom Elias Derby felt was too academic to be a vessel's master; and Elias was relieved to have Gibaut give up the command of one of the Derby ships to accept the post. Gibaut had bought a chronometer in Paris for his ship—an impertinent extravagance! This had been the cause of Elias Derby's displeasure. A Yankee sea-captain had no need of such folderol. If he were worth his salt, he could smell his way by his lead.

Prince had noticed Nat's growing fever of restlessness during the spring, and offered him the position of calculator to the survey. Nat accepted quickly, for Ward's store had seemed for the first time in his life

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to be definitely confining—a prison. This service of calculation that would take him out into the open fields, where he could see the horizon, was instantly to be preferred. They offered him one hundred and thirty-five dollars for the work, a magnificent recompense, enough to buy many books he wanted to own.

He had not worked long with Prince and Gibaut before Gibaut found that here was a boy after his own heart. He asked Nat to go to sea with him as supercargo and captain's clerk in the next command that Elias Derby should provide.

And so it happened that in July, 1794, Nat was at last looking forward to the sea, to the actual entering upon its life—the life that was the undercurrent of all the life around him.

IV

The shadows that fell in Nat's cheeks from his high cheekbones seemed to bracket his mouth and make it stern, but being out in the fields all day slowly brought a gentler look to this boyish cruelty of his lips. There were fields before him instead of printed pages, and there was more warmth, more simple space, that beckoned his mind to loosen and wander.

Although his hair was tinged with gray, it was normally quite fair, and in the bright sun the gray did not show. A relaxation came in the lines of his forehead too; it softened his brow and drew less emphasis down into the eyes.

In these warm summer evenings, Nat would fall to wondering about his life, to wondering about Salem, and there occurred in his emotional growth that dreamy

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surcease of all activity more typical of adolescence. He thought with less bitterness of Reed's closed shop, and the empty back room, and with wonder for what he had received in exchange. But Reed's whole day was given to the study of nails, and a search for money to finance his project.

Did one have to be something of a clown to live? Was it necessary to be—well, a balance master, and, in the phrase of the itinerant performer who advertised his show, as an effect of “crab-walking on his hams without the assistance of his arms or legs touching the floor”?

He had once thought, when his studies flourished so fervidly, that the sea life which all masculine youth must undertake was trivial and unimportant. Yet here he was considering a voyage with Gibaut! Still, Nat persuaded himself, Gibaut was different. He was not a blatant automaton, cheating the native Dattoo at weighing pepper and parading his bellowing voice and heavy legs.

The tanned masters who made purchases of tackle at Ward's store were shallow, absurd people. Nat often wondered what gave them their loud voices. What happened at sea to make men thus ridiculous ashore?

Nat's own feeling about the ocean was one of subdued suspense. The regularity of waves made him thoughtful, and he was sure that the long separation from shore on a voyage would enhance this and make it a pleasant place to do his work. He looked forward to the voyage with Gibaut as a chance to work. . . . There was more idle speculation about his own affairs in the attic room than there were formulas proved.

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V

One particular August afternoon, Nat had been alone in the fields near the Boardman house. Elizabeth Boardman was walking through the grass, aimlessly, humming the tune of "Robin Adair."

She was not frightened when she suddenly came upon Nat. She had smiled at him. It was the smile of his dead sister—quick, direct, and the eyebrows lifting as the lips curved. Instinctively Nat put out his hand to touch her arm. Then suddenly her face colored, and her eyes were large and serious, and she quickly turned away. Nat saw some promise in Elizabeth Boardman's eyes. Some warm flickering of unguessed life was there. The coolness of her arm remained in his fingers.

That evening when his eyes refused further labor, he reached up to a dust-covered shelf and took down Nathan Reed's flute. As he cleaned it, a curious smile curved his lips. The unhappy restlessness of the early evening left him.

Nat bent over the flute, and several low notes drifted out into the warm evening air. Air that hung quietly in the space of the proud, wavering line of the streets—streets that wound now with the last bend of the earlier, more flexible Indian paths—primitive paths underneath Salem streets. . . .

Nat was confused. He remembered the actual meeting with Elizabeth. He forced himself to recall each trivial detail of it. Then the whole thing swept him in a sudden access of vivid presence, an evocation. He twisted the flute in his hands, as though some one were in the dim room, looking at him, with suave, urbane

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composure. His ears felt hot. He ground his teeth; he could not sit still. His fist doubled round the flute tightly, and he kept beating his fist on his knee. It was so foolish for it to have come off this way in the field! What a fool Elizabeth must have thought him—a shy, confused fool! And this was so wrong, so wrong! He beat his fist. He was not that! He was not a fool! He had seen her eyes, her bright lips—bright enough to be burned by fever. But her arm was cool!

Why had he touched her? Why had he not talked pleasantly, instead of standing mute, dumb, like a cow? Prince thought well of him, and Bentley—Gibaut, Hodges, and Nathan Reed.

They thought him unique, a person that maybe America might one day look to. But what could Elizabeth think? How could she guess what was in him? He beat his fist on his knee again. Anger, blazing scorn, passed through him as he thought more about it. He rose uncomfortably from his chair, and twisted about. . . . Ah! there was a pitcher of cold water.

Eagerly he drank from the pitcher, and set it down. This simple thing to do with his hands seemed to have eased his whole body. He sank back into his chair by the open window—and gazed out into the quiet summer evening, over the brown shingled roofs of the town, thinking.

VI

If Nat lacked knowledge, he had practice in finding it. Despite the late hour, he left his room for Judge Ropes' library. He had often noted there the volume of Dr. William Alexander, who wrote with much feel-

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ing on delicacy, chastity, and courtship in his "History of Women." Until to-night, Nat had ignored it. Now he read carefully.

"When a man falls in love with a woman," read Nat, "he first proposes his conditions to her parents, without whose consent no marriage can take place. If they approve of him, he repairs to their house in the evening, in order to make his court to the young woman. At their usual hour, the old people, and the rest of the family, go to bed, leaving the lovers together. Some time after the lovers go to bed also; but without stripping themselves naked, to avoid scandal. If they are pleased with each other, the bans are published, and they are married without delay. If not, they part, and never see one another any more, unless the woman be with child, when the man is obliged to marry her."

Nat's choking emotions quieted gradually as the first bitter sentence came back to him. "*He first proposes his conditions to her parents, without whose consent no marriage is possible.*"

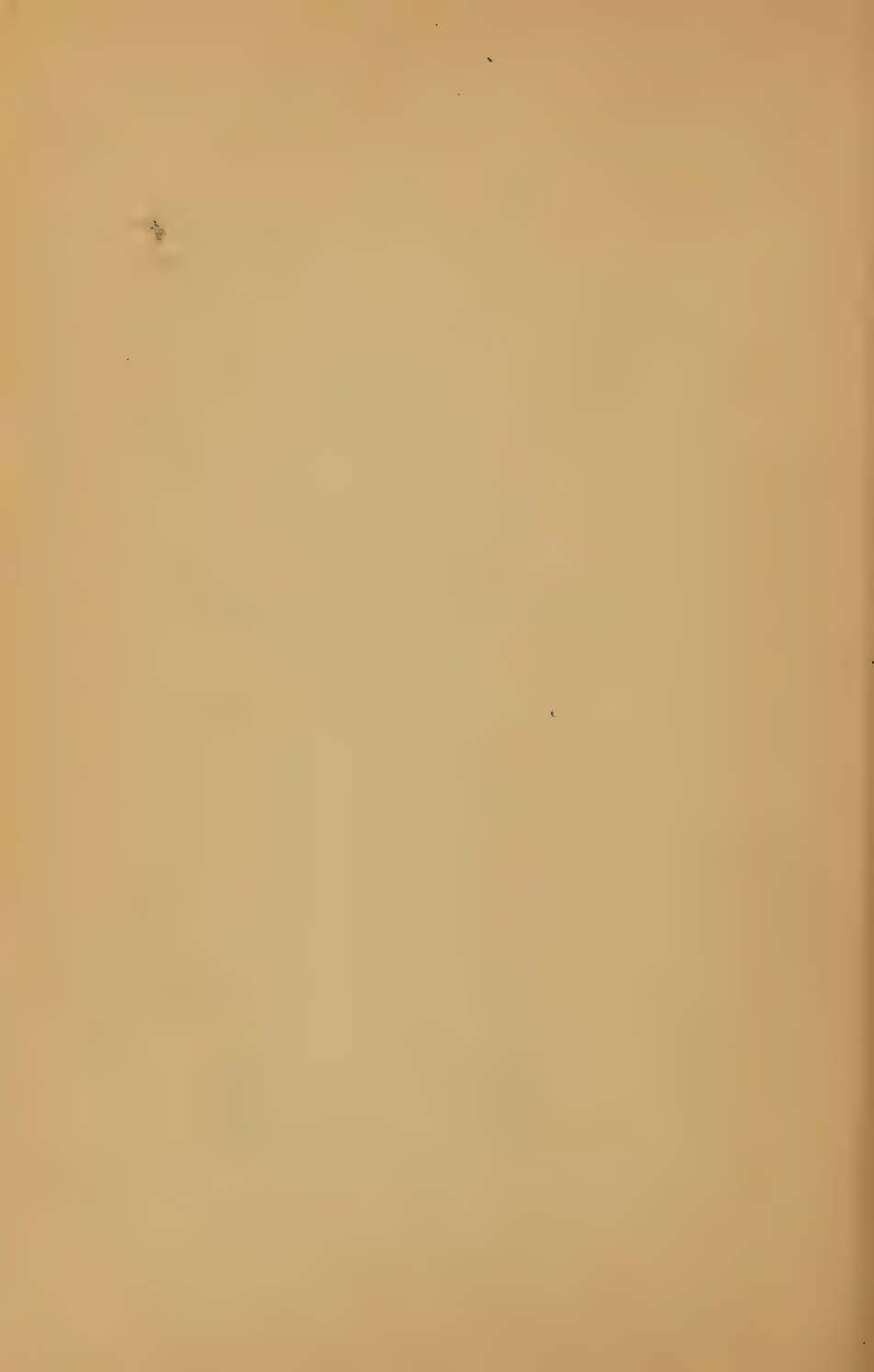
And so the first warmth of love brought Nat into deep contemplation. "His conditions"—whenever in the world would they warrant statement to Captain Boardman?

It was not many days after this eventful evening, when Nat was seen in the tavern for the first time.



IV

WINE, ELIZABETH, A VOYAGE BEGUN



Chapter Ten

I

BEWILDERED and constantly troubled by the very hopelessness of his situation, Nat began to make a few headlong and reckless plunges into life. Instead of an evening at his work, he went to the Sun Tavern. A few pots of Medford seemed to soothe him.

He put out his hand, to steady himself, leaned on the table. In a new loud voice that inwardly delighted him, he called to the tavern keeper. His voice was thick and unwieldy; but when he shouted, it carried far.

“Med—ford—rum!”

“Can you pay for it, my young sport?” old Bill, the tavern-keeper, asked, walking up and looking doubtfully at his new customer.

Nat cast aside his native prudence some hours earlier.

“I have—a hundred—an’ thirty-five dollars—this fall—you see, hun’dred an’ thirty-five, for th’ survey.” Nat sat down suddenly, quite exhausted. His head swung over, but he was quick, and got his elbow on the table in time to catch it in his hand. But his elbow slipped out, his head and arm sprawled over the table.

In a moment he recovered.

He leaned back in his chair, frowning, his pale lips moved. He began to talk to himself now. “I’m like a

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deep-water fish," he pronounced, solemnly, slowly. "I can drink, an' drink, an' drink. I can live in an ocean that would drown other men."

He struck the table with his hand.

"I'm serious. Water, wine, whisky. Some men say wine is water, water is wine. All captains are drunk, an' none are sober. But I'm sober . . . and Moses struck the rock with his staff where the Lord had directed, and from it a stream of living water flowed. That's rum, Moses—"

An unshaven sailor at another table let out a great guffaw.

"Listen to the psalm-singin' ship's monkey, eh?"

II

Another pot of rum was set down in front of him. It made a noise as it hit the table that seemed to jar Nat to his backbone, and break his reverie from him.

"Stop that!" he shouted savagely, and reached around with his arm as though to give his servitor a cuff. The gesture swung wide and recovered into the picture of a gentleman stretching, and making himself at ease.

Nat took a sip, and stuck out his lower lip, seagoing style.

"Pfah!" he sighed, in the manner of a professional, and reached for a tumbler.

Some one hit him a slap across the shoulders, just at the wrong moment. Nat caught at a near-by jug without thinking, in a white anger. As he turned, he slung it. At the same time he was caught in his throat with a choking cough.

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The jug flew wide of its mark and broke against the wall. Nat looked in amazement at the red face of his visitor. It was his father, Habakkuk.

"Tut, tut!" said Habakkuk. "Don't treat your poor father that way!"

In a moment the embarrassment of the situation subsided, and Nat gestured grandly. "Sit down, father."

"There's another man with me," replied Habakkuk, as though bashful at availing himself of his son's largesse, and taking his son's presence in the tavern with no outward show of surprise.

"Bring him," returned Nat.

Habakkuk beckoned. Nat turned his fogged eyes toward the approaching figure. He rubbed his eyes with his knuckles. "It's Henry Prince!"

Prince was astonished as he took in the detail of Nat's situation. "Why, Nat," he said foolishly, "if my early mentor, the beloved Reverend John, should see you now, he'd think over again all he's been telling me about your studies."

"Sit down!" cried Nat imperiously; then more affably, "I'm the ancient mariner."

Henry Prince broke into a roar of laughter. "Well, is that so! I join you. I'm a captain now. I'm captain of a Derby ship, and we go out from Salem in a few months—for Cadiz, and then round up on Good Hope, and shoot for the Indies."

"A pot of Med—ford!" called Nat.

"It's a long time, Nat, since we hunted leopards together," said Prince, rubbing his finger in small circles on the table.

Nat shivered, and quickly regained his calm. He nodded seriously toward Prince as he had seen Jona-

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than Hodges do when discussing a weighty matter of business.

"It was a queer day, that," went on Henry Prince evenly, "queer. Do you remember how dark it was? Just as though you'd been sleeping all night in the barn, and there was hay-dust in your eyes, the way it covers the barn windows, and everything was clouded and yellow."

A fresh jug of Medford arrived, and Habakkuk awoke from his lethargy, and automatically passed his hand toward it.

He drank long and deep, only a rich gurgle marking the silence occasionally. He at length set his pot down, and Nat pushed it toward Henry Prince.

While Prince drank in a more leisured manner from a tumbler, Habakkuk got his breath back, and addressed his son.

"Nathaniel," he said, "I may say I was more than surprised to see you here."

"I'm going to sea," returned Nat abruptly. The slight disturbance set up by the remembrance of Dark Day had sobered him a little. Still, he was not sure he could see the objects in the tavern clearly. Punch-
eons and casks and pipes ranged against the opposite wall, with little brass pans underneath the bungs to catch any drip. The pans were separate from the floor. Why had Henry Prince tried to confuse him by recalling Dark Day? That was so long ago.

"I'm going to sea with Captain Gibaut, when we've finished the survey," Nat remarked.

Henry Prince started a moment, as though he were going to speak, but decided in the end to say nothing.

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Habakkuk also seemed affected by the remark. He turned his head away, ever so slightly, as though shrinking from an unseen blow. His face was overcast with the expression it used to wear when he was a younger man, and people asked him why he didn't go to sea. The same sense of private tragedy and pain was there. No one asked Habakkuk Bowditch any more why he didn't go to sea.

"My son," Habakkuk muttered slowly, "I hope you never meet the—the Godless thing that swallowed my life, I hope you never—" It was too sad. A tear dripped over the edge of his flushed cheek, where the bone rose under the eye.

"What was it?" put in Henry Prince, setting down the jug. "What was it?"

"Once off Funchal I saw a mermaid under the bows. She looked up at me and smiled. We were bound to Boston, and swung out there for a cargo of wine. How can you understand what happened between us?" Habakkuk's hand shook as he reached for the jug. "So I let you think it was a black-birding voyage that made me a no-account. Or you can say it was the Revolution that ruined me, and that I want the English to come back. Of this, be sure. I stand for the defeated!" At this last sentence a fire blazed out of Habakkuk's old eyes that kindled what it struck.

"You sympathize with the British? They are stealing the slaves you pity. They are stirring up the Indians out West, the Indians you say own Salem. I don't know what you are, nor do I care. But if you're going to even speak of England—they who are seizing our ships, impressing our seamen—your neighbors

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maybe—on the high seas!— Well, no man can see ten thousand of his brother sailors taken off their ships without reason, and be a good fellow.”

Nat felt the world slipping slowly and quietly from under him. The raised voices of Henry Prince and his father lulled him toward sleep. His head swayed drowsily.

“I have my sorrow,” murmured Habakkuk in a lower voice, “and no one can understand it.”

“You are a Tory!” rejoined the younger man hotly. Then his wrath seemed to fade, and Prince laughed. “Sorrow! You’re a spigot without a handle! One day it’s the wrong to the Indians, and the next it’s the black-birding, and the next it’s the mermaid you saw in the water off Funchal in Madeira. Yes! That mermaid you fell in love with was the product of a pipe of Madeira wine!”

“I don’t care,” replied Habakkuk as he took his lips from the jug with a pop, “I did get a fine son, anyway. You can’t argue that away.” He paused a moment, and the old look of pain and defeat crossed his face again. “Now that’s a thing for proper grievin’,” he said, “look at Nat there. . . . I tell you I’m past hoping to be strong like a fool, when I see what I see.”

Old Habakkuk, having finally found a convincing subject for his grief, relapsed again to the jug.

III

The white look of Nat’s face worried Henry Prince. He called for a towel soaked in cold water, and pressed it down over the boy’s eyes.

Nat opened them suddenly, startled, wild.

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"Washington Hall!" Nat cried suddenly. His eyes closed again, and his thin stiffened body shrank back into the hickory chair.

Habakkuk was attentive only to the matter of the jug before him. Prince bent over Nat in a kindly movement of sympathy.

"See, Nat," he said soothingly, "we're all children again. You're just asleep because it's early in the morning. But you've got to wake up, because we're going somewhere. You said you'd show the way. Remember? Hab isn't here, he's at sea somewhere, and I haven't any gun. But here's a flute here on the table. Put that in your hand."

Nat's fingers closed convulsively about the flute, and from a long distance he heard the words of Henry Prince. The tallow dips were lighted. It must be evening. Nat could see the pulsing tips of flame in the darkness.

"Come," went on Prince, "you'll be sober now. Just a little Medford won't hurt you. Anybody'd think it was Antigua you'd been drinking, or corn whisky from the James River."

He pressed another icy towel down over Nat's eyes. "You said you were going to show us where the leopard was—"

Nat's lips moved slowly. "Not—not leopard," he whispered.

IV

In an hour, Habakkuk was relatively insensible to passing events in the tavern. Nat, on the other hand, had noticeably recovered his natural processes. He was able to walk, and to speak words distinctly. But his

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mind was remote, as though it were under some malignant spell, as though a sorcerer had taken it, and had given him back a stranger's mind that did not quite fit his body, or work with it.

Or maybe the sorcerer might have given Nat another body, an old body, one Nat had left in the marshy meadows on Dark Day; and the sorcerer had simply thrown a thin, clinging kerchief over his mind.

Nat was thinking of the American balance master, the renowned Mr. Bennet whose performance Ben Crowninshield had once taunted him to attend. The image of a sorcerer was dimly present in Nat's consciousness. Some one had done a trick to his body and his mind, had played with them separately.

"Washington Hall," Nat managed to repeat.

"But, damn my ring bolts, why?" Prince asked impatiently. "Whatever put that in your head?"

"Dancing class," returned Nat, looking directly up into Prince's amused smile. "She'll be there."

Prince laughed. "But that's in the spring, Nat. That's not for August."

"Don't fool me. It's May. At Uncle Jonathan's the lilacs are out. In Danvers the fields are turning green, and the elms on Essex Street are full of buds like feathers."

Henry Prince shook his head. "Nat, you must never try cognac . . . Very well, then, square up your yards, and we're off."

Nat shook himself free of Prince, and stood regarding him with an even gaze. He was not thinking of Prince, but of a girl in figured tarlatan. A film of cloth drawn down smoothly to the waist, and flaring out into a bell. And above, eyes. Warm eyes that drew his to

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their pools. A hand graciously, shyly, extended toward him, with an inclination of the head, and a quick, direct smile, that seemed to warm his whole body. . . .

Nat found himself smiling. He held his flute in his left hand. With his right, he reached for a half-empty tumbler of Medford.

He raised the tumbler slowly towards his lips, and looked down into it. He noticed the rim of the glass was engraved. The tavern-keeper had brought a cut-glass tumbler to the table for Henry Prince. Habakkuk drank from the jug. Nat had been drinking from a thick glass, and from the jug, like Habakkuk.

"I propose a toast," said Nat evenly, as he raised the tumbler. He closed his eyes, and raised his face. "O God, my Father . . . to—the unknown quantity!"

With a slow tilt of his head, he drained the tumbler.

V

Some one had come in. Several were standing, talking by the entrance of the door—young men.

As Nat's hand fell to his side, he turned his head slightly toward the direction of the voices. The engraved tumbler remained loosely held in his fingers.

"The band is going to give a concert in the Square first—"

"I say, the Salem Band is ridiculous. Now, in Boston—"

"Do you think they will try a quadrille to-night? Why there must be these damned new steps passes me. It's the girls, of course. They like to show you . . . Yes, whisky for me."

"You can't always press against the wall, even in a

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cotillion . . . Yes, whisky. . . . Give me a partner whose scent is sandalwood, and I'll dance a waltz until squares are polished in the floor."

"My sister tells me that Elizabeth Jeffry—you remember how she was at the dances before she married Reed?—she kept her clothes in a camphorwood chest, with Eastern extracts—"

"Why, your coat is scented! What an idea!"

"It's the partner that counts—waltz—minuet—or quadrille. With Elizabeth Boardman—how that little girl can dance."

"She goes home early," laughed one.

"She is a baby," said another. "In Boston she would be in bed by the time that waltzes began."

"No—you're right, Ben. There is something about the young ones at a party. You can always be amused with them—they are so fresh, like morning in the garden."

"Put your whisky down, you'll forget you are a man in a moment."

"I'll put my fist down your throat! Elizabeth seems older than she is." There was a sharp pause. "It is lung fever—consumption; Nathan Reed says it makes girls long for love before their time. Have you never noticed how bright the child's lips were?"

Nat moved slowly forward toward the speaker, the engraved tumbler still in his fingers.

"Your talk about the children makes me sick, Ben. It's quite disgusting and unmannered. Come to Boston some Friday with me in the stage—" he stopped talking, for Nat had come between him and Ben Crowninshield.

Nat regarded Ben quietly for a moment, measuring

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each detail of his immaculate presence—the dark suit of English broadcloth, the smooth perfection of his pomaded hair, and the excellent gloves and shining boots.

“What were you saying about Elizabeth?” Nat asked Ben simply.

Ben Crowninshield had lost his presence in surprise at seeing Nat within the doors of the Sun Tavern. He drew in on the tapering twist of Manilla cheroot he was smoking, and breathed out the smoke reflectively.

“I was speaking to my friend, a Mr. Edgecomb, of Boston,” returned Ben slowly, glancing from Nat, who was dressed in the clothes he had worn that day in the fields, to the pale blue trail of smoke that rose from his cheroot.

“About Elizabeth,” persisted Nat.

“I did not mean it to be of interest to you,” returned Ben coolly, as he arranged his cravat. “I see you are in a mood to challenge me, defend her honor, or some such low-class foolishness. Well, we can discuss that at some other time.”

“I did not mean to have you supply me with the question,” cut in Nat. His head seemed suddenly clear of the vapors of the rum, and his body gifted with a resilience. He stood equally on his feet, his head a little forward. “I meant to ask what you meant when you said she had a lung fever, that made her lips red. Is she sick? So that Nathan Reed can tell it?”

“Reed is as much a doctor,” returned Ben, clearly marking the force of his words with his mouth, “as you are a gentleman.”

Henry Prince had been listening a few steps away. Young bloods with their backs up. How old he felt!

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Because he was a captain? Sea life, since he had finally run away at fourteen, had aged him beyond the nearly equal years he shared with all who stood in the group. He was older, too, in the hundred little conventions that surrounded the life in Salem. He was a daring and skillful mariner, but it was not his daring and his skill alone that had won him command of a Derby ship at early years. The command of a Derby ship to the Indies, Prince well knew, was the commencement of a fortune in his own pocket. He had suavely manipulated John Gibaut into the extreme disfavor of Elias Derby, and it was secretly understood that he, not Gibaut, would command the *Henry* when the time came for her to sail in the late fall, and her repairs were complete.

Henry Prince fixed his eyes on the tumbler that Nat still held in his fingers. He had a swift vision of Ben Crowninshield wiping blood and fragments of glass from his face in a moment. It was a horrid and nasty enough thing for Ben to have said. But Henry Prince knew what Nat did not know about Salem. He knew that back of Ben Crowninshield there was the house in Derby Street, whose parlor was set in lavender panels, with candelabra whose crystals caught tints of rose from the carpet, and when the candles were lighted, they sent yellow sparkling darts over the paneled walls. Back of Ben Crowninshield stood this: and the firm of George Crowninshield and Sons, second only to Derby and William Gray in power—the store on Union Wharf, the counting house, wharfingers, clerks, vessels. . . . A burning sense of the unfairness of the situation that left Nat uninformed of the harm he might work for himself with a head muddled by the unwonted

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Medford. The whole situation resolved in a moment, and shot into his arm in a single swift gesture.

He sharply knocked the tumbler from Nat's hand. The glass splintered on the floor and lay in thin, bright fragments.

Nat apparently had not noticed what Prince had done. And Prince had miscalculated Nat's intent, for after an incidental glance in the direction of the broken tumbler, Nat moved toward the door.

Prince heard him muttering to himself.

"Elizabeth, sick. Her lips are red . . . because she may die." His thin body vanished through the door a little unsteadily, out into the dusk of the street, where beat the removed throb of music from the band that was playing in the Square.

Chapter Eleven

I

NAT made his way toward the music, and found himself going down Pleasant Street, along the Square. Torch flares gave off a flickering unsteady light that caromed from the brass and silver of the instruments, and brought them to momentary notice. The players made a music that was irregular in all departments save the steady boom from the drum.

Nat drifted slowly around the edge of the Square, toward Brown Street. Finally his steps placed him directly on his way to the Boardman lawn. Just why, he did not fully understand, for the music had depressed him, the knot of people that spread in thin radii from the center where the band was, served as an emphasis to his outer loneliness and need. This confused him, but as the rhythm of the music dimmed he was more sure of his course.

The lawn in front of the Boardman house was not so deep, and its portico not so important, as those of the houses that lined Pleasant Street, or the upper part of Derby Street. From a pilastered door, two rows of lilac bushes graduated down to roses, and between them went a brick walk.

The night was quite clear, and in the starlight the brass knocker in the form of an anchor, stood out clearly on the white door. There were lights upstairs.

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Nat turned in from the street and walked up the bricks. Francis Boardman, Elizabeth's father, was a retired master of moderate circumstances. His few small trading schooners that remained with antique perseverance in the Northwest Fur Trade kept alive the umbilical cord between Francis Boardman and his former quarterdecks. Between the gables of the house a captain's walk had been built on the roof commanding a satisfactory view of the harbor, although the master, who walked there regularly, saw the entrance of a schooner flying his flag perhaps but once in three years. For the most part schooners were kept between Canton and the Northwest America, furs and tea, and arrangements for cargo transfers were the order in these days that moved mainly barks around the Horn.

Nat feared the presence of Francis Boardman as he approached the door. The old captain was erect and unyielding; in his infrequent dealings at Ward's he had been abrupt and precise. But perhaps Mary, or even Elizabeth herself, would open the door . . . Nat struck the knocker once, and was amazed at the loud sound the door gave back.

In a moment, the door swung abruptly open. Nat could feel rather than see the striking eyes of Francis Boardman peering down at him from white brows.

Though the light in the hall was dim, Nat could see behind the tall straight figure before him the reflections the lamps made on the polished floor.

He must make some excuse, Nat hurriedly thought. He must contrive a way that would take him out of sight.

"Elizabeth—" he began half-heartedly. Then he suddenly realized how much the sight of her coming

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down the stair would mean to him. Maybe she would smile the same way she had the eventful afternoon in the fields. Maybe she would remember that. Nothing else mattered.

"Nat Bowditch!" the peering figure suddenly exploded. "Is anything wrong at the Hodges?"

"I want to see Elizabeth," repeated Nat, quickly brushing aside this unexpected form of excuse he could have grasped. He went on, determined, "I want to see her."

"They have gone to the Square, all the women, to hear those blasted fog-horns. You may find them there. What happened? Did she leave ten fathom of anchor chain behind her in the store?"

"No—no," replied Nat quickly; then, suddenly aware of his foolishness before the other's deep-voiced jest, he became confused.

"There is something—to-night—a dance?" he murmured hopefully. Nat remained desperately tenacious to his purpose of touching some definite thread of Elizabeth, and wholly unaware of the finality of her absence. His rum fumed mind was wholly single.

Francis Boardman laughed; the arm that held open the door relaxed a trifle, and his voice fell. "There may be some bilge going on. I heard a great discussion about shawls that might have some bearing on the point. You'd best look for them in the Square."

Francis Boardman closed the door, not unkindly, as Nat turned and unsteadily descended the several short steps to the level of the brick walk and the slim, withering stalks of the lilacs.

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II

Nat found himself walking down Pleasant Street, against the Square and the moving crowd of people again. The distance from the Boardman house had been filled with tortuous imaginings—entwined about himself and Elizabeth, and suddenly brought closer to realization by his moment of daring with her father.

When his eyes returned to sight, there was a quickened jerk of his pulse in his wrists. He might see Elizabeth at any moment, in these passing people. These moving dresses might conceal her. Each merino shawl might circle her shoulders.

What was love? Yes, this was a part of it, a quickened recognition of a memory, of its importance to you, a memory that entwined you this way, as a vine on a stalk—a quickened step toward what might be a memory alive again, shining in a new way. This must be—love—that was pulsing in his excited being, as lightning will pulse and flare behind clouds. It was strange, to find it so much a part of that world of lightning and clouds and leafy trees, after all.

In the old volumes of Shakespeare that Judge Ropes had brought from London, which were in the Hodges house where he lived, there were periods about love. And these Nat had taken as unnecessary to the march of events that were the leaded lines in the final window of the play. When he had purchased blank books at Dabney's book-store, it was inevitable that his eye should steal inside the covers of "Thoughtless Betsy," "Tears of Sensibility," or some other allusive title chance placed near his exploring fingers. There were not many exact texts on the manners of love. Dr.

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Alexander's "History of Women" was the only authentic guide.

But he knew now; Nat was sure that this thing that inflamed his body, gave a daring to it that could face Captain Boardman down—this was after all a very real thing in him. Not so distant as chance phrases in the books, not even so distant as Elizabeth that afternoon in the fields.

Confidence welled strong in Nat, that love was no literary figure, but a force to shake the body, and cause a dryness in the throat. Was that—he stopped short, and crossed the street to the edge of the Square, his heart in time with the bass drum; quickened, as he saw it was Elizabeth.

His feet hurried him, quite breathless, to where she stood with her mother and sister. How absurd for his throat to be dry, when he needed his voice.

He made a sound with his lips, completed into a half-anguished gesture with his arm when Elizabeth saw him.

She came quickly to where he stood, at a slight distance from the others, and noticed with alarm his hard breathing.

"Nat! What is it? What happened?"

Nat fought for time. This moment, he realized, was important. Perhaps she would catch the aroma of Medford from his breath. He stepped back uneasily.

"What is it, Nat, tell me. Nothing has happened to the Hodges' baby?"

"No," stumbled Nat; then in a low voice, with held breath, "It's me!"

"You—you? I don't understand." She flushed a moment, suddenly recalling the circumstance of their

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meeting in the fields. "Just a minute, mother," she called over her shoulder, "it's Nat Bowditch. You go on with Mary, and I'll follow. . . ." Elizabeth murmured to Nat, "I'd better take care of you."

Nat did not hear what she said, or take its meaning in. His heart seemed to have suspended its quick beating—as if carried on the solo notes of the cornet. His ears had in them a faint whirl. He stopped, and put out his arm. If he could only speak! He wondered if Elizabeth noticed the sweat on his brow. If they could walk together to Hardy Street; the people would all be at the Square—their gardens deserted. He could tell her there. He had been in one of those gardens once; and he remembered the soft green sod that bordered so close the lap of tide ripples on the beach. There he could tell her. There he would understand from the simplicity of the water exactly what it was that he must tell her.

"What is it, Nat?" repeated Elizabeth, now that the others had moved a distance ahead of them. Elizabeth knew now from Nat's walk that he was not entirely sober.

Her voice was clear; he might have been looking in another direction, and have heard in her voice the slight amusement that marked her lips in a smile.

What was the use, thought Nat, of following an involved course to the simple shining idea that was the center? Once with the idea of telling what was in him directly to Elizabeth, there was no strength left to consider his instinct and develop it slowly with her, talking gradually toward the end.

The word exploded from his throat unexpectedly. He did not say it as speech is ordinarily given into

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words by the lips, but as though the word came from the center of him.

"Love. . . . Elizabeth, do you understand?"

Elizabeth Boardman was like any young girl in Salem, who heard from her older sister problems of this sort; nor was she without a vague expectancy that one day it would be a problem for her. Gentle inebriety and words of love . . . She was quite unprepared what to say. Not that she had not often thought of love when she was with the younger men. It was her habit often to relapse into fancies about it, and give answers in conversation that were half-awake, half-dreaming.

Why, then, did her mind revert now to harder things? She thought of it afterwards with a little wonder, at how she had shunned her first romantic adventure. Nat seemed so young and his eyes had an unnatural wildness that frightened her.

There was an awkward pause.

"You're carrying too much sail, Nat." She drew herself up, erect like a captain should be on his quarter-deck. "You'll carry away some rigging, first thing you know."

Nat stared at the erect, swaying figure of the girl beside him in utter amazement.

Elizabeth went on, after an awkward, boyish laugh. "You must shorten sail, Nat, if you want to handle your ship in proper style. There are a lot of captains in Salem who need to learn that." She laughed in the way Captain Boardman might have laughed, rather an advising chuckle.

Nat stood still. The music, the people—they seemed to rotate. It was so bewildering.

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"I'm going to sea in the *Henry* with Captain Gibaut," he said suddenly. "I will be a captain, if that's what you must have."

This conversation was coming more into the field where Elizabeth felt she could take hold. "You know," she said confidently, "that Captain Gibaut is not to take the *Henry* East? The meanest wharfinger in Salem knows that gossip. Captain Prince will be appointed."

"I saw Henry Prince to-night—"

"Certainly," cut in Elizabeth, determined to keep the course of their talk in waters she could navigate smartly. She rubbed her forehead with her hand as she had seen the ship surveyors do. "The *Henry* will be ready to sail by the late fall. Yesterday I saw her in the stocks at Becket's Beach."

Nat was walking again, more rapidly, to keep up with her. Elizabeth glanced down at the grass under their feet to see whether the lace edges of her pantalets were catching in the damp grass.

"But, Elizabeth," breathed Nat, closely following, "love—can't you see what it is? Can't you feel it?"

"Please, Nat, do not talk about it to me—now. Don't you see?" Elizabeth suddenly spread open her hands in a moment of warmth, almost in tenderness. "My father wouldn't encourage the addresses of a man who was not at least a captain." That was as much her own romantic picture as it was her father's.

Nat only too readily, too hopelessly, understood her meaning. But the tenderness of her gesture lingered. The frankness of feeling in her voice remained. Both unnerved him completely. She cared!

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Elizabeth quickly sensed the tensivity of the situation and again returned to safer topics.

"Some say," she began, "that the East India trade will soon call for the building of larger, heavier ships, great numbers of them. Mr. Derby flies into a rage when it is mentioned. But, then, I can't make father see that the day of the schooner and small trading bark is over. He will not understand. But," she spread out her hands again, "it's easy to see, isn't it?"

Nat caught her arm firmly, and stopped short. His voice was hurried and scant of breath. "Elizabeth—I will sail with Captain Gibaut—or Prince if it is as you say—and when I come back from that voyage, shall we walk together down this same street, and will you answer the questions I ask?"

Elizabeth looked up, and met for the first time the full intensity of Nat's eyes, met them openly. Their force startled her. It was all clear between them for the pressure of a moment. Then fear and bewilderment invaded Elizabeth's upturned face. Her head sank in a nod.

With the nod her body seemed to twirl sidewise from him, and Nat saw her go running over the grass to her mother and sister, tightening her blue merino shawl about her throat as she ran.

III

To get away from the people, that was Nat's first thought, to be alone in the streets, or by the water—in Liberty Street or lower Derby Street, the empty counting-houses. He bent his steps that way. He could go

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out Charter Street, by the old burial field, it would be quiet there; but death—death was there. Nat thought of death with terror. His grandmother, she was death, or the loose head and stiff arms of Ben Carraway drowned on the *Nabby*, that he had seen drifting in to the shore. As always, Nat instinctively shrank from horror, from unpleasantness.

He wanted to be by himself, apart from what might intrude. Liberty Street, with the darkened windows of the counting-houses facing into the empty pavement—there was nothing about a counting-house that could invade or disturb, as would the meadows on the road to Danvers, or the burial field out Charter Street.

IV

Surely, his heart beat out to him, in Elizabeth's final nod some truth of his feeling had not escaped her; and, therefore, his feeling was more real than ever.

In the pain and pressure and rotation after the moment with Elizabeth in the Square, his bewildered being struggled back to poise within itself. Now his mind seemed able to help his body more.

He leaned back against the clap-board sheathing of the counting-house, exhausted with the struggle to discover what might be in Elizabeth's mind. This much was clear: He would not see Elizabeth until he had returned from the voyage in the *Henry*. If Captain Gibaut was not to be in command, his position as supercargo could be secured under Henry Prince quite as readily, he felt. He remembered vaguely Henry Prince's kind hands in the tavern.

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V

From her bedroom window, Elizabeth Boardman could view the harbor activities with almost the same wide inclusion as her father might from his captain's walk across the roof of the house, just above her room, and certainly with more comfort.

Early on the morning of January 5th she heard the steps of her father pacing his walk in the biting cold. The boards that formed the walk creaked; an occasional early vehicle in the streets ground and whined its wheels over the ice.

Elizabeth Boardman lay half-erect in bed, propped on her elbow, looking out the window that viewed a snow-sheathed garden, roofs in the lower part of the town, and the wharves of the waterside. The sun poured in the eastern window of the room, swept across the sleepy pallor of her face, and lighted the white linen her jet hair fell against. It was pleasant in the room, for all the leaden look the Bay showed.

Captain Boardman was on the roof early, to note the probable wind and weather for the day. Elizabeth awaited his descent through the trap door into the hall outside her room with mounting impatience. Out in the bay, if the calm that held the black water as though it were frozen to smooth ice should break into a favoring wind, the long-delayed sailing of the *Henry* would take place that day.

Elizabeth considered for a moment the work that had been done on the hull of the *Henry*—she had followed each detail of its progress—the replaced sheer strake, the new shrouds, the altered masts. They had tried to remodel the clumsy *Henry* to resemble the

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lines that younger shipbuilders spoke of as the coming race of East Indiamen.

Occasionally she had seen Nat near the ship in company with Henry Prince, whose command in the stead of Gibaut the choleric Derby had confirmed. They had each avoided the other, Elizabeth and Nat, as if by agreement. Though Elizabeth's spirited interest in maritime affairs put them in the way of each other, they had not spoken since the memorable incident late in the summer when the Salem band had performed in the Square.

She lay back on her pillow, and was lost for some moments in reflection. She had discovered through Mary Hodges, Jonathan Hodges' wife, much about Nat. What impressed her was that Nat was deep in every printed work on navigation that could be found in the Salem bookstores.

Elizabeth till now had not thought so much of this aspect of Nat's all but proverbial mathematical talent. Masters commonly navigated their ships by good judgment, exploratory gift, and recollection of previous passages. Dead reckoning she herself understood thoroughly, and could see little use for it. You measured on a chart the distance you made on each course, and allowed for side-sweep of tide and the vessel's natural leeward "creep." Sailing before the trades, up from the Horn, to be sure, where there was one long stretch, you could guess what figure to put down with only a small error.

But beating into head winds, days on days of tacking back and forth, would invalidate and confuse the most precise navigator. A chronometer, she understood, might help you to better figures, but a chronometer was

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worth the pay of a whole crew for a voyage. Elizabeth sided in this matter ardently with her father's dogma, and with Derby's conviction.

The dead-reckoning figures were silly to keep, after a certain point, because a sudden flaw in the wind or a slight compass error would leave the figures still perfect, but their fact meaningless. And so few of the captains, who were in the house now and again to visit her father, could hope for accurate results in any continued arithmetical problem.

All Nat's study and calculation might do well enough to survey a plot of irregular ground, but the ocean would submit only, Elizabeth felt sure, to fan-bearded men with re-echoing voices. Still, she wondered.

"Mary," she suddenly called to her sister, asleep in the bed beside her, "wake up! It's seven bells, and time to hit the deck."

There was no response from Mary's slow-breathing form.

"Roll out, sailor!" Elizabeth shouted, so loud that it strained her chest, and set her coughing.

Mary wakened slowly, and finally stretched and pushed her brown hair back from her eyes.

"Elizabeth!" reproved Mary sleepily, "you have that nasty cough again, and it's all because father won't forbid your standing on drafty wharves."

"If you want to talk sense—all right," returned Elizabeth with an effort against her dry throat; "otherwise go back to sleep."

But Mary was completely awake, and soon sat hunched up in bed with her knees pulled under her chin. The room was cold; she twisted a quilt about her shoulders.

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"I remember," Mary began, "last night you came in with the news that the *Henry* was to sail to-day. Captain Prince—" Mary sighed.

"Yes—" murmured Elizabeth, "Captain Prince. You will miss a waltz with him. But," she sighed, "you will find some one else."

"So?"

"You're only a child," went on Elizabeth maliciously, "you don't know anything about love. What is love?"

Mary regarded her younger sister with a smile.

"What brought that to your mind, Elizabeth?" she finally asked, amused.

Color had come into Elizabeth's cheeks, perhaps from the exertion of coughing, and her eyes were bright as she stared fixedly toward the foot of her bed where she had draped a guimpe of China crepe the night before.

Elizabeth did not answer her sister, and accordingly Mary took up the teaser's straw.

"I suppose you will go to the Derby wharf this morning to see Nat Bowditch off."

Elizabeth turned a disdainful stare at her sister, and let the remark pass with a movement of her head.

"A strange way for lovers to behave," remarked Mary, "you two. Do you remember what you were telling me last night, before we went to sleep?" Mary laughed gayly.

Elizabeth stopped her ears with her fingers. "I don't want to hear!"

Mary swung her feet from the bed to the floor, and slipped her toes into a pair of Chinese slippers of rose silk brocaded in orange and silver figures, that were the very secret envy of Elizabeth.

Navigator

VI

Elizabeth Boardman appeared at launchings, departures, and arrivals in the company of her erect, white-bearded father. She was among the last to arrive of the small group that gathered at the windward side of the wharf by the busy decks of the *Henry* that morning. She had delayed her impatient father with an unaccountably persistent hunt for a blue merino shawl that was edged with a red border in minute squares. At last she found it, and tucked it in around the collar of her greatcoat, with one end flying loose in the wind.

Her father had walked quickly and silently all the way to the Derby wharf. It was plain that her delay had disturbed his mind, accustomed as it was to punctual movements by years of living by the quaint rule that governs the activities aboard ship with ironlike regularity. His walk, too, showed traces of those years afloat. It was a kind of drooping lope, as though the feet might not be sure of the angle of surface beneath them at the next moment.

They passed the snow-covered warehouses and stores at the foot of the wharf, and made their way to where the frozen fasts of the ship were stretched out to the bollards on the wharf.

Elizabeth glanced aloft at the rigging critically. The remodeling was a clear compromise with the ideas of the younger men. On the foreroyal the diminished figure of a man moved out on the yard-arm, slowly beating the frozen canvas free and clearing the running gear of ice.

The wharfinger was busy in conversation with Nat,

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who stood at the waist of the ship, with upturned face, receiving his last instructions as supercargo.

Elias Derby, elaborately wrapped in a heavy muskrat coat, leaned on his cane from the wharfside, and issued parting injunctions to his alert captain, perhaps an excuse for the small number of trading dollars provided. After all, this was Prince's first important command.

Elizabeth's heart beat as she saw Derby give a word of greeting to Nat.

"You keep your eyes open, Nat," Elias Derby called out, "and when you come back show me all the business in clear figures."

Elizabeth heard Derby mutter as he moved back from the wharf's edge. "I understand figures."

The *Henry's* fasts were let go one by one. Men on the wharf pried the frozen hawser loops free from the bollards with belaying pins and marlin spikes. The high-pointed bowsprit was pointed toward the open sea, and aloft a sail or two had spread in response to the sharp commands of Henry Prince.

"Let go clew lines! Clear that jib forward! Let her have the jib!" Prince dropped his speaking trumpet, as the ship slowly edged forward along the wharf. "Hold that stern fast!" Prince shouted, then to the helmsman, "Swing her bow off, I want to give the wharf more room." "Let go stern fast! Mr. Mate, tell your men forward to give her the staysail."

The *Henry* creaked, ever so softly, as the wind began to draw in her canvas, and the small group on the wharf had to hurry toward the end of the planking to keep up with her gathering speed.

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Clear of the dock, the bark leaned under the assault of a gust. A marked ripple at her high bows became audible.

Elizabeth, standing at the end of the wharf, caught her father's hand tight in hers.

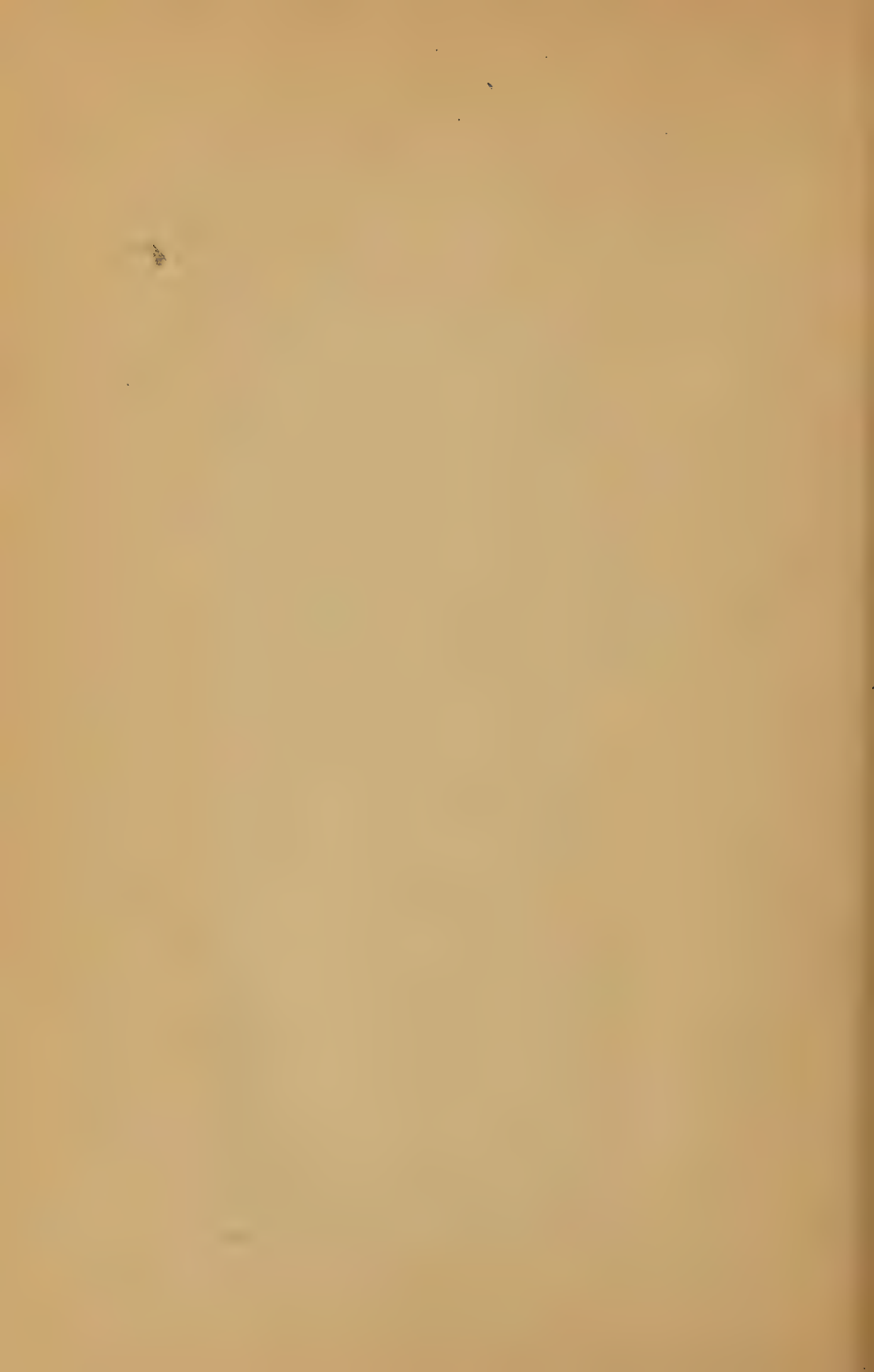
"Father, a ship is so wonderful, when she moves off that way—and so very small to be going so far!"

On the stern, near the helmsman, stood Nat. He faced forward, and did not look back; he did not turn for a last look at Salem—not until the vessel was several cable-lengths away, already seeming to have a life of her own, separate from the shore.

When he did turn, he saw, among the closely gathered knot of people on the pierhead, a sudden flare of a shawl, caught bright in the sun—a blue merino shawl, with minute red squares worked into the edges. He saw the upraised arm and the fluttering blue spot the shawl made in the air.

V

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA



Chapter Twelve

I

NAT, under pressure of the reigning mercantile fervor that held sway in Salem, had not incautiously embarked on his first voyage to the East. It was the apex of style to go provided for trade into the wonders of the lands that provided sandalwood, and teak, and pepper, dyes, and spices. Three boxes of shoes were crammed under his bunk aft, in place of the books that might have been expected.

The strenuous duties of a supercargo in supplementing the commercial endeavors of the captain and keeping the ship's books, manifest, and inventory had been talked up vividly by the youths who had graduated to the counting-house. This, with the vociferously introduced remarks of Henry Prince as to Nat's purely seacraft duties, had kept Nat from realizing that life afloat in a slow-sailing bastard rig like the *Henry* might be in the end a very lazy affair.

That seemed the case now. Vast stretches of moving water, growing milder and more sapphire-like with each day, rolled on and on under them, under the ship, with her sails all set and drawing up among the close-woven cordage. Favoring trade winds confirmed the reality.

The outward-bound cargo was carefully tabulated on tally sheets. There was little to do but become fa-

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miliar with this inventory. The *Henry* carried a typical Derby cargo, such a one as the past indicated would be well received at the Isle de France (the more modern Mauritius), not far to the eastward of Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean.

There were boxes of wax and sperm candles; barrels of hams, beef, pork, flour; hogsheads of tobacco; a few casks of oil, and West Indies rum; soap, flints, and bridles in boxes; cannon and powder, and some shot; lard and fish; and saddles, tables, and desks. In return they might hope to trade for a cargo of sugar. The *Henry* was of about 180 tons gross burden; a cargo of 170,000 pounds of sugar would settle her as deep in the water as would be safe and expedient.

Aside from contemplating this inventory and carefully pricing each item in dollars and in pounds of sugar, there was nothing for a supercargo to do. Such a calculation did not occupy Nat more than a fortnight.

This freedom from occupation was distinctly not the expected phenomenon, the lustily advertised quality of sea life. It threw Nat inward with violence, and at the same time cut him off from his roots, the displaced books.

At night, on deck, these freed thoughts wandered in his head until they reverted to Salem. And these floating dreams did not hover long over Salem without encountering the vivid image of Elizabeth Boardman. Her eyes—the spark in them when she spoke of ships, the glow that rested there when she was quiet, her lips, and the dark hair that covered the temples of her delicately made forehead, the way her slight body stood against the wind—Elizabeth in a thousand forms, but always—with an almost inevitable fatality—resolved

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into one final image. The scarf floating out from her hand as she stood on the end of the Derby wharf; she stood out against the snow-covered roofs, the whitened dock, and the group of people huddled together in the cold behind her: she stood out like a promise . . . and here fancies would break away under Nat, as thin ice far from shore might have given under his venturing feet, and he was let back into the world of the night and the presence and sound of passing water.

II

Early in February they sighted a British slave-trader, which provided a moment of colorful stink on the horizon. Prince recalled several tales he knew of the "black-birding" trade, of how slaves were bartered for with the headman of the coastal village, how they were stowed, and the numbers of dead that were thrown to the gulls each morning. A long voyage invariably sent the price of slaves up, because there were fewer left. It was in the foreground of American commercial adventure, ranking with the staple West Indies molasses, made from the cane these negroes cut. But, as Prince remarked, if you had any sense of smell, it was a closed career.

Nat recalled the story of African Tom, told by men on the coasting schooners that ran from Norris' wharf in Salem to the James River.

"The African enumerator, they called him," Nat went on. "He could tell the most minute divisions of time involved in any period—how many hours between the day we left Salem and this moment—he could tell that quickly. Captain Stevenson said he learned from

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counting the hairs in the cows' tails, the cows he was set to watch."

Captain Prince walked up and down the short official pathway of his quarterdeck, a frown of impatience marking his forehead. He had forgotten the slave-trader and the African enumerator. His mind had stopped at Nat's mention of the number of days from Salem.

"I wonder when we'll have made our southing?" he muttered. "The *Henry* is slow, very slow, even if she is one of Derby's small ships."

"We ought to make Isle de France by the end of April, at this rate," offered Nat. "I was figuring it out last night."

"That's the devil of it," remarked Prince. "Derby hoped we might reach Java. The sugar from Isle de France he'd like to see pieced out with pepper and coffee. But the trading dollars are too few to make it worth while. And the time! Suppose the Salem markets change? And then there are smart young men like Enos Briggs to propose a still heavier, larger type of ship for the East Indies! What bilge they talk!" Prince made an impatient gesture. "Derby is right, of course, the shrewd old fox—only he doesn't go far enough. He ought to get old Becket to build him faster ships."

Nat leaned against the bulwark rail and braced his feet against the slow roll of the ship. "Whichever of the two happens to be right," mused Nat, "somehow they should be able to prove it once and for all by figures instead of having every shipmaster carrying on this stupid dispute. I've heard the case of small ships against large ships argued for so long that I begin to

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feel that if captains, honestly arguing the point, haven't been convinced one way or the other by now, they never will be."

Prince laughed. "This is too complex a thing for your figures to solve, Nat. You've got to prove things in this business."

"Nevertheless," returned Nat, "if the sailing time were lessened, the heavier ship is ideal for a long voyage such as the Indies trade. I think you'll live to see Briggs' ships that he calls East Indiamen carry this trade."

Prince nodded briskly. "However will you make a fat ship move faster. You can't. Besides, is it not better to have many smaller ships that are swift at work, than to trust all to one heavily laden ship?"

Nat shrugged his shoulders. "Better maybe with the present methods of navigation."

Prince frowned for a moment at the sharp independence of Nat's statement. "Well, whatever you think, Nat—don't mix up in this argument. Let Gray and Derby and the rest make old Retire Becket build the kind of ships they're used to. It's no weed off our keel. What do we care?"

Nat glanced over the windward rail behind him, where a wave slapped up against the moving hull, and sent a slight, lazy shower of spray down over the deck in little dots.

He faced Prince again. "I'm absolutely sure," he remarked slowly, "that small size has nothing to do with the essential fact of the argument. When I say vessels need a new system of navigation, I mean I can make the heavier vessels beat the smaller ones, if the smaller ones are run the way they are now. The first

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essential is the distance to sail. I believe a straight line is the first step toward speed; then let the question of size be governed wholly by what is cheapest to build and to run."

"Don't for heaven's sake," exclaimed Prince with mock terror, "let the old badger hear you talking that way! You remember how all the fancy arguments of your friend Gibaut were answered? He's ashore, waiting for a command. He might as well begin to farm at once."

"You navigate," returned Nat, "by dead reckoning instead of observation. You ought to get longitude from the moon, and latitude by the sun. The figures you use are guessed. They are not the straight line at all."

Prince thrust out his lower lip. "You can't do much with figures in any system," he answered. "Figures let you in for mistakes. You get to believe in them blindly. A slim, fast ship is the only answer."

Nat laughed. "But can't you see this—even a fast ship without careful navigation is no improvement over a slower vessel with a good navigator in her?"

"All right," returned Prince, facing Nat. "All right. How? I have a sextant aboard. What the hell use is it?" Nat rubbed his nose, and let Prince go on. "I read my observation, say of a star, or the sun's altitude. Then I turn to Johnny Moore's book, and do a lot of figuring, and come out with a result I know is wrong—sometimes preposterously wrong. I've been off Funchal, and just for experiment—right within sight of Madeira hills—worked a longitude observation that has placed me off Gibraltar. Every figure I took from Moore's 'Navigator' was right. My sex-

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tant is a Stackpoole—you've seen it—it cost a fortune in London. Now tell me I should trust those figures! Suppose I had?" Prince laughed. "Nat, you can play with books ashore and get parsons like Prince and Bentley all worked up, you can stay awake all night thinking about your plan—but at sea it's different."

Nat answered with a characteristic reversion to his childlike faith in reason. "Figures are the same at sea," he said; "they don't change."

III

The weather did not hold its fair aspect so steadily, as February passed into March, and March into April. Wide, clear horizons gave way to haze, high seas, and rain. There were heavy storms, nights in the lower latitudes when there was work aloft for all hands. It was not extraordinarily heavy weather; just the usual mark of the season's variability in these waters, the barest hint of what the ocean might be stirred to do.

Yet to Nat's wide eyes and uncertain feet, the roar of a dark-green crest foaming down over the deck past the shrouds and ropes and rigging secured at the foot of the masts and at the bulwarks, seemed an angry enough affair.

In these moments of emergency, when a rope carried away, or a sail must be taken in, Nat took his place on deck. Once he dove after a slithering rope's end that had come adrift, and caught it. The rope tore through the palms of his hands with unexpected, fiendish energy, as though a giant had suddenly made it his whim to snatch the hempen snarl from Nat's tightening fingers. This misadventure brought him stinging

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palms, burned raw and biting with salt, and curses from two of the crew whose eventual duty it was to secure the freed line.

Now again pride struggled in Nathaniel's frail body in its ancient battle to run away from what was unpleasant, from that which frightened him. And still he wanted to be thought well of by the crew. His soul craved the admiration of these men. It was this deep hunger that fed Nat's pride.

It finally worked out that during storms Nat was more likely to offer his services aft, where he might relieve Prince on the quarterdeck, and speak the conventional words of encouragement to the helmsman from a position by the ship's compass.

He would sit hunched up before the binnacle, watching the swinging dial, and shout to the helmsman when the *Henry* veered heavily from her course. This was the way Nat's impulse to be of importance worked out: that the ship be kept on her course. It seemed to procure a kind of dim safety in his mind, and lent him the advantage of a vicarious service with his fellows, who were embattled aloft with billowing canvas, or struggling forward with taut ropes, carelessly brave in the face of danger.

IV

Fear became vivid and sharp-edged in Nat only when Prince gave a cry of dismay or when a wave toppled its crest down on the deck. To see an orderly run of straight-seamed planking suddenly transformed into a seething, boiling bath of foam, gave him an inward shock, the sensation of sinking. At first he would close his eyes until the heaving deck rose clear and the rush of water out the scupper ports had relieved the burden.

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Despite his gradual acclimation, Nat could never look at the seas slowly looming against the bulwarks, cresting, and sliding down with a rushing turmoil of foam and spray, without great wrenches at his heart. It seemed like life being overwhelmed, extinguished.

Even when he grew more used to the sight, after the *Henry* had rounded the Cape of Good Hope, this clutching fear remained undiminished. It gave him the sense of suspension in his heart. Pride, too, remained, the wish to be with the sailors, struggling up to their waists against the swirl at their legs. . . . But Nat could not bring himself to face his fear. He thought his back would be crushed and made sodden in a moment, like a piece of paper. . . .

On the eighth of May, the *Henry* finally made harbor at the Isle of Bourbon, on the up-to-date charts of the period named Réunion, but still referred to by sailormen as Bourbon. Anchorage in the open roadstead before the mountainous tropical island left them almost midway between Madagascar and the Isle de France.

From one of Bourbon's volcanic peaks, a trail of smoke twisted and wound away toward the bright air of the East.

Henry Prince looked toward the town clustered above the beach, and smacked his lips.

"There are women in that town, Nat, who know how to love you as no others can."

V

On the ninth, after dinner, Nat climbed into the long boat with Henry Prince. The steady thrust of oars carried the long-boat easily over the broad swells that

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swept in from the sea. Astern the *Henry* dwindled against the sky. Now the roar and foam of surf, and with a lurch the boat shot up the beach on the shoulder of a wave.

Ashore, Prince and Nat left the crew, and they began to look the town over together.

The low houses of the natives seemed to have been but slightly varied by the commercial foreign population of Chinese and French. The distinct addition of the latter seemed to be a gift for gardens and streets. Nat particularly noticed with a glow of pleasure how the streets cut up straight from the shore, and intersected with one another in precise right angles.

Nat pointed out to Prince how this same geometric atmosphere pervaded the gardens; the layout of orange trees and coffee bushes was backed by palms and mangoes. In the republican garden in the rear of the governor's palace, for example, the French instinct for order and arrangement was carried over into a more elaborate use of design, as if to certify the superiority of the population to the rank tropical growth. Here the different walks met in the center, and formed the figure of a star. Each outward ray was indicated by thirty-four mango trees in a line, and each line anchored at its end by the stem of a tall palm.

Being a town not infrequently the resting point of voyagers awaiting the seasonal change of wind, the low houses of the island did not omit certain ones that were places of entertainment. Madeira wine was to be had in plenty, and the local vintages. Palm wine was in general favor with the traders, and an occasional brace of claret or Malaga was broached from the stores of ships in the roadstead.

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In all, Nat found the taverns as unlike those of Salem as the rectangular streets; their purpose was more literal and on the surface. Here, it appeared, one drank to envision the face of a sweetheart in the dark flat features of the slave girl. Slave girls bearing wine . . . soft brown creatures whose every step sounded through the small space of the hut with a metallic clang from the iron bands about their ankles, in sharp solicitude. When a captain or a sailor entered the thatched doorway of one of these native drinking places, the clang of hurrying feet could be heard from outside.

Curiosity prompted Nat to glance into these doorways several times. On each occasion any further impulse had been checked by the sight of some simple act of abandon that struck him as lewd. There appeared to him to be something coarse in the happy way these dark girls fondled their lovers, in these glimpses he had caught. Still, he could not wholly avoid a curious excitement in recalling these scenes afterward . . .

Perhaps it was this sensual undercurrent in the air that made him uneasy, impatient to leave the harbor, for the voyage to go on, and this idle waiting to cease. At the same time it grew apparent, as reports came in with other traders of Malayan piracy, cannibalism, and meager offering in the East, that the wisest course to pursue was to spend the months of unfavorable wind loading Bourbon sugar, and using the trading dollars to buy spices and coffee from vessels in the harbor.

There were a number of these whose trade had been so unsatisfactory that they had decided to return East for another attempt. These vessels were glad to get the trading dollars in exchange for a part of their car-

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goes. Prince had to pay a slightly higher price for his spices and East India merchandise here than he would have paid in direct buying East. Sugar, too, was higher at Bourbon than at Isle de France. But Prince held to his plan, to complete and return with no further eastward voyaging.

The trading was desultory despite Prince's sporadic efforts to speed it up. Accordingly, Nat found himself free the greater part of the day. At first he tried to use this opportunity to gather data about trade winds and the monsoons from other captains in the port. . . . Forever asking questions . . . At other times he studied Moore's "Navigator," searching to determine to what degree it might merit the scorn Henry Prince gave it on every occasion of its mention . . . At other times, he paced the rectangular streets that ended with the sea at each turn, his mind put to rout by the laughter and sounds which came from the native huts that bordered the waterfront.

VI

After their stay at Bourbon had lasted a month, this idea occurred to Nat. If Nathan Reed had forsaken his mechanical experiments to solicit money to found his nail factory and draw on the new parental credits, he had had something in exchange. How much of what he received in exchange amounted to the satisfaction of merely a natural need of the body? The philosopher persisted: if he should be loved by one of these brown girls, would a sanity as simple and as hard as Prince's result?

As the monotonous days of their stay drew on, the

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restriction of mottos and maxims of purity seemed of less and less consequence; more and more to be a simple evasion of the exact issue.

After the usual evening meal had been concluded aboard the *Henry*, Nat had grown in the habit of accompanying Prince ashore in the long-boat. They parted at the beach, Nat by this time understanding the diversions Prince might encounter, and Prince quaintly solicitous for Nat to accompany him.

But so far, Nat had preferred the streets, and to sit under the palms in the Palace Garden, and observe the sharp images the moon shadows made on the pebbled walk. He preferred this mightily to a solitary evening spent upon the decks of the *Henry* idly swinging at anchor with the changing tide, always rolling in the deep swells that swept solemnly, endlessly, into the open roadstead.

Land, even if it were a strange land, seemed to bring him more peace at night. He fancied it brought him closer to Elizabeth. When the tropic darkness had once fallen, and the sounds from the wooded shore drifted out over the moving water, he could not be held by his calculations.

It was better ashore; he could walk a distance, if need be, and tire himself physically so that when he returned with Prince to the ship, sleep was not long in coming. The precise arrangement and pattern of the Palace gardens seemed to rest him as well, when he walked down the paths. The mathematical aim of the branching paths that ended in a straight palm was deeply satisfying, more especially for the disturbing forces of subequatorial night. The night was unbe-

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lievably moving, so glittering above with all its set of dissimilar stars.

Walking down these graveled paths, or resting on a wooden bench, Nat felt more at rest. He was conscious of life going on in him, almost pleurably conscious and inquisitive about it.

In this security he would even debate the native huts, and the irrepressible impulse that attracted him. Oh, to forget! To go in the door free of revulsion! To let go! To swim full into the tide of life! Like other men!

It was hardly adolescent curiosity for details of the sexual reality. It was more mystic, more diffused, than this. It was the details after all that had kept him out of the simple houses where he heard the girls singing, where he saw their frank smile and smooth arms so ready to encircle.

Thinking this way had loosened a vast emotional tide in him. He went back to think of Elizabeth, with intensified longing. Her curious smile, that seemed an acquiescence. . . . Nat tried to think about Elizabeth's smile, for it was this one unforgettable thing that was the essence of her power over him, the curving lips and their show of teeth.

He thought of Elizabeth to still the anguish in him, full knowing it but awakened anew this most subtle and complete craving that ate at his vitals. Was Elizabeth a short cut, figuratively speaking, to the perfection he wanted from formulas of numbers?

He felt Elizabeth superior to these savages. Had he not seen the taut mold of her firm breasts above the finely drawn waist of her dress? These savage women had loose breasts that dangled when they walked. By

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their breasts, he separated them, more than by their color, their difference in race. . . .

It was on one such evening that Nat had a curious adventure in this garden. It was, perhaps, ten in the evening. The sky was full of its different jewels, and he had left Prince on the shore two hours since. For every patch of bright starlight in the garden this evening, there was a spot of shadow, sharp and translucent on the ground.

The darker parts of these shadows, where they separated from the edge of the garden and wove into the thickets of underbrush and tangled vine that bordered the edges, became penetrable to his senses by the sounds that came from them of small animals stirring, or a bird moving somewhere, as though the shifting of that slim body, made lighter by its faint sleep, could start a noise he could hear. He heard sounds as he sat quietly, thinking of Salem, and the many miles of bare far-reaching water that separated him from its houses and clustered steeples and the Bay. The ocean seemed more desolate than desert, the most vast unfriendly thing to man there was upon the face of the earth. He felt cut off and solitary this night.

The small sounds of an unfamiliar life in the intimacy of its drowsiness made the place more alien, the unnatural brilliance of the stars between the foreign foliage that was so bitter and sharp in its shape so unlike the misty elm in moonlight, the feathery maples of Essex Street, the domestic horse-chestnut on Brown Street that grew in front of the house where he was born.

He heard a step on the gravel, an unmistakably human step—there was no reason for his heart to pound

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up into his throat—the step of a woman. He glanced up, and saw her approaching, vaguely at first, as a spot of white, and then—almost suddenly the brilliance of her white dress passed the shadow of a shrub, and he could feel her face rather than see her dress. He made a sudden, involuntary contraction of his legs under him, as though preparing to rise.

Startled by the sound, the woman glanced around abruptly.

Nat saw it was his duty to speak; he must speak, for the woman was afraid.

“Excuse me,” he let his voice carry, “I must have startled you.”

He did not think that French was a more probable language. He simply spoke. Nor was he surprised to hear her answer in English.

At first her voice was hesitant. It was a young voice, quite rich and vibrant in its tone, with a strange precision in its accent. “Oh—you are alone—I do not intrude—?” the voice’s query reached Nat like a caress.

He saw the woman carried a fan.

“No,” said Nat. “You are most welcome. I am quite alone.”

The woman laughed richly, as she came near, “I thought you were Captain Stanton.”

“Of the *Jonas*?”

The woman spoke now with a ball-room ease, now that her moment of surprise had passed, and she manipulated her fan with grace as she walked, quite wholly in the manner of the ball-room.

“Perhaps,” she replied, “it is almost enough for me to remember the names of the captains in the roadstead, without also memorizing the barbarous titles of their

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ships. Have they no names in America but those of people to give to ships? A ship is much prouder than the names you give them; although"—her tone became arch as she found a seat on the bench Nat had forsaken—"your ships are hardly—" her remark passed in gracious laughter.

Nat took his seat after a moment. "You are English?" he ventured.

"And you from Salem," was her reply.

What was the meaning of that laughter, that mockery Nat sensed beneath the freshness of her voice? But he did not relapse into the comfort of following out the thought. She was speaking again, now half reclining against the back of the bench, dreamily, Nat fancied, though he did not keep his eyes directly on her to determine exactly.

"Yes," she said, "and I am the mistress of that house there, the mistress of the Palace. They call me," she concluded, with a slight recurrence of laughter under her words, "the wife of Monsieur, the Governor, whose hospitality you enjoy."

"But he is French," persisted Nat, "a short little man—I saw him several times. He has a beard that is parted, I remember that, and a small head and a quick way of speaking. But you—tell me, how did you come here?"

Nat felt her eyes on him for a moment, through the darkness he felt them, as he had heard the sounds of the small animals without seeing them.

"I understand you," she said after a moment, in a very cool voice. "I am afraid of you. Do you know," she remarked with a sudden fanciful seriousness, "that you could kill me?"

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She laughed abruptly, Nat thought. He felt the breeze from her fan—she must be moving it.

"Men that are like you quickly kill women who are like me and must depend upon what frail mystery they have for life itself. No, it is about you we must talk—and your American Colonies. Oh, I think I understand you as if we had known each other for many years."

"I could kill you?" repeated Nat, amazed. "What do you mean?"

"See, see," mocked the woman, "there you are—you would trap me even when I have warned you. You would always want to know more—until—you would simply force me backward from a high cliff. But I must not seem dull. Somehow, I know from your voice that you are an extraordinary young man. I felt it as soon as we were together here. Tell me—you must tell me—exactly what do you do? You are not a captain—you must not tell me you are, for command is not in you, it's not a part of you."

"You are right," answered Nat. "I am not a captain. I am a supercargo officially, and a mathematician by study and interest."

He was interrupted by her delighted laughter. "Exactly," she cried, "exactly. You must not mind my laughter. I frequently do not laugh for long periods, and it is not complimentary, I'm aware. In a way, I am laughing at myself, for the happiness I have now is like the feeling I have when the pieces of a bodice fit perfectly. I knew it."

Nat tried to breathe deeply, and make himself more comfortable. The ease of his companion's conversation was enviably contagious. And, however was it that she knew things this way?

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"Do you say that," he asked, "just because you find me here, alone, and not drinking with the others? Or is it my clothes, or the way I stand?" He was confused. "You said you knew I was a mathematician."

The woman's voice dropped to a low note, almost of earnest pleading.

"Please," she begged, "you must not ask me questions. I would have to answer you, where I would not answer a thousand other men. I would want to answer you. And that, in the end, would be the same as if I wanted to die. Oh, be assured, I do not want that. I want to live, to go on . . . Let me hear you talk—about Salem. I know you were thinking of Salem, when I came down the path. Are there many Indians there? I have always wanted to see the Indians in America."

"The Indians?" echoed Nat. "They are almost all gone from the East. There are plenty in the Ohio country, and also in the North. My grandmother used to frighten me with stories of them when I was very young." He was silent for a moment. "I remember once a grave was dug, and in the loose soil she found a skull. She was sure it was the skull of an Indian, and protested with sound cursing when it came time for her to die, against being buried in the family plot."

"But you do not remember them?" inquired the woman again.

"No," Nat laughed, "only my grandmother holding that skull in her hand. I shall never forget that, her old face, the hate in it. I think she saw a tomahawking once, a scalping."

Nat saw the woman's foot, in a white slipper, swinging slightly from under the plain rim of her dress.

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The little detail he had told seemed to have put him more at ease. He could see the woman's dark hair, and how white her face seemed beneath it, and her neck.

"Can you tell me," he asked suddenly, "about love?"

The instant he had said it, the recoil sent him into confusion.

The woman closed her fan swiftly, but when she rose her movement was more calm.

"I must go," she said simply.

Nat rose too, and, holding his breath, he stepped close to where she stood, and took her hand. He shook his head dumbly. "No," he murmured, "you must stay. You are beautiful. When you smile you are like—"

The governor's lady quickly released her hand, and drew it back sharply. "No!" she whispered.

"Oh, stay!" cried Nat impulsively. "You must stay—at least."

The woman shook her head, and moved slowly backward away from Nat.

She suddenly gave a low, sharp cry, and, gathering her full skirt in her hand, swiftly moved down the path, and was lost in the shadows.

VII

This singular adventure in the Palace garden remained with Nat as the lady in white had left it. It had the spell of a mystery, an enchantment deeply sensual although its romance had remained only in words. Although he was drawn back to the garden many times during the rest of the *Henry's* stay at the anchorage of Bourbon, he never saw her again. In a

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way, from this time on, he felt definitely superior to Prince, and to Reed. He knew the promise of something they had never touched. With Prince, it was quite marked. Nat was less awed by his position, by the fact of command, by Prince's apparent mastery of maritime intrigue. He felt less impulse to compete, to assist Prince in his plans. But his own work took a sudden spurt of accomplishment. His comparison of the texts in navigation thrived mightily. His vitality was renewed by this chance encounter in the garden, and the sound of the woman's rich laughter in the vacant paths . . .

He could hardly wait for the day of sailing, as though he had come on a treasure he must hasten home with, a discovery that enabled him to understand Elizabeth more, to want her more deeply.

Shortly before they weighed anchor, at the end of July, he sold his three boxes of shoes at a profit that would almost equal the wages he would draw for the voyage. This was a surprise that illuminated the process of Derby in miniature style. It was easy to see how, with ships, money multiplied. But the money was not a thing to capture Nat's imagination wholly when it was full of the words of a promise, the knowledge of what Elizabeth might be. Nat was returning with this inside him. It was a treasure as strange and as novel as the first sight of oranges had been—unbelievably gilt fruit in sharp green foliage, shining like spots of unearthly glory in the sun, a promise of paradise and miraculous knowledge. . . .

Departure roused the spirits of the crew, as almost any sharp change awakens men. They felt a return of new life in their arms once the capstan bars were in-

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served in the capstan head to raise the anchor. Their chantey began irregularly, but soon gathered gusto under the quick lash and bite of familiar commands. Bound home, on the favoring trades! The trail of smoke from Bourbon's volcanic peak slowly sank into the horizon.

The *Henry*, now settled deeper with her cargo, plowed a steady curl of white foam out from her bows. All day in the scorching sun she sailed, and at night the close murmur of the bow wash from her sides rose, and seemed to mingle with the dim taut canvas that swayed ever so slightly against the stars.

Chapter Thirteen

I

IT was December, and the *Henry* was driving through the slate gray winter seas that roll the mid-Atlantic. By January, early in January, they would again see the spires and roofs of Salem. The quiet harbor would take these untiring planks into an embrace of rest, against the side of the Derby wharf. Sailing westward from the dimly sighted Azores, perhaps their first landfall might be Nantucket Island, or Martha's Vineyard. Again, their position might be more northerly, and Cape Ann or Cape Sable be the first yellow line of shore.

The ship was filled with the excitement and anticipation of homecoming. Food. That would be first. Then the money to spend, rolling down Paved Street by the shops, singing up Liberty Street by the counting-houses where the dull drudges sat and figured. Then to the tavern and the familiar aroma of Medford rum. . . .

In the after cabin, Nat and Henry Prince sat alone over the supper table. A glass of Cacavilla rested on the bare pine board between them. They had been talking together of Salem. Behind Nat, the rudder post ground and creaked with the rise and fall of the hull. The rush of water away under the high chunk of the stern quarters came to them dimly lowered by the intervening planks and timbers.

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Under the spell of the *Cacavilla*, and the anticipated arrival, so close at hand, among familiar—as Prince said—Christian waters, ambition began to burn its lambent fires in the hearts of each.

“The *Astrea*,” commented Prince as he fingered his glass absently, “should be in Salem about the time we arrive. The gossip seems to be that Derby will displace her commander, and use the ship on an important voyage. He has evidently come to the point where he will experiment.”

“So,” mused Nat. “And you hope—”

“I hope for that command,” said Henry Prince, setting his glass down firmly. “That’s one reason I chose to limit this voyage—to be back in time.”

Prince was silent a moment. He glanced up at Nat.

“Would you care to hear the full history of Gibaut’s dispute with Derby? It bears slightly on the *Astrea*.”

In answer to Nat’s nod, Prince continued.

“Mr. Derby, it is true, was angered at Gibaut’s purchase of a French chronometer. But before that, there was a controversy in ’93. Gibaut had the *Astrea* out East—Madras, I think. The ship was seized—right under his nose, mind you, he was so slow with her—Gibaut and the second mate were literally kidnaped by savages under the direction of the King of Pegu. And they carried the King’s cargo of supplies for his army. The *Astrea* didn’t find her large cargo space so profitable on that voyage! That was how Gibaut lost the *Astrea* on his return. The chronometer dropped him from the *Henry*. Now, no skipper who has had the *Astrea* has ever dared to drive that craft to her limit—her skippers seem awed by her size.”

Nat listened, silent.

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"Naturally," Prince went on, "believing in the *Astrea*, and knowing Derby's plan to try her again, I want to be back in time. It will be a close shave—only a few months' leeway. As for this trip—we've made enough; nothing to burst any one's eyeballs out, but enough. What's the use of pounding up through the Straits of Sunda, wearing past Java Head, in a tub like this with so few dollars? When I find the right ship under me, I'll dare all hell. Till then—" Prince's jaws relaxed, "till then, little experiments, little playing on the ocean. All I'd ask, to have wealth for the rest of my life, is several trips to the East in a craft like the *Astrea*."

Nat nodded, and sipped his wine.

"You have changed your plans some," he remarked quietly.

"You mean because of my wanting to get the *Astrea*?" asked Prince. "Yes," he went on slowly, "I have. While we were at Bourbon I thought a lot about your argument for a way to make quick passages in the larger ships possible. My guess is that Enos Briggs will win out. He will build the larger ships. The gossip that Derby is thinking seriously of counting on the *Astrea* for a real voyage shows he may be doubting the old war cries just a little. Maybe he's just the least bit afraid some one else will make a paying voyage in a big ship, and he be outstyled. It looks that way to me."

Inside his shrewd head, Prince felt sure that was the case; he felt sure of it since hearing the talk among new arrivals of Derby captains at Bourbon. What he saw, too, was that Nat was the very pawn to win the game, that he was essential to a remarkable passage.

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Furthermore, the boy was picturesque. That might count some with Derby—it wouldn't be a sea-captain inverting first principles for Nat to propose his plan of navigation. There was Derby's aloof but friendly interest in Nat. Prince reflected, Derby would not be giving in to a captain, but taking the part of a boy with an idea. Furthermore, Nat had once been a favorite of Prince, of Bentley, and the other learned divines of Salem's meeting houses—that in its quiet way would do its bit to assuage any mistrust of revolutionary ideas, wild schemes that might imperil Derby's wealth. Nat was approved, Prince reasoned, and there was a chance—who could tell?—that he might materially shorten distances with his calculations.

Prince was not the man to overlook a position that contained elements to his advantage. He planned to use Nat in his new scheme. Prince would ride the new crest of the wave that was bound to come. He would be the forerunner, the innovator who would prove the new race of East Indiamen practicable. It would mean thousands of dollars in his pocket, and power in Salem.

He did not speak of his whole plan to Nat, but showed him parts of it.

"We've all been used to the small sails of these light trading vessels," said Prince. "But I'm sure that sail area can increase more than proportionately with size. And I'll rig the *Astrea* with an enormous spread of canvas—that is if I get the chance—and you with your figures—why, Nat, don't you see? The whole of Salem is in our hand. The future of the United States! Of her ten million dollar trade, we can make a hundred million!"

Nat found himself listening to the rush of water,

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the deadened sound of it as it came to them from the night outside. The romance of this plan was so boundless and so sweeping that, after his first surprise that Prince had somewhat reversed his earlier views, Nat received little thrill from their elaboration. His mind fell back to its undercurrent.

"Moore," Nat remarked, "turns out to be an Englishman."

He suddenly pushed back his hair with his hand. "John Hammond Moore, his name is. A man named Edward Blunt in Newburyport prints the American edition of the 'Navigator' you have. I have read it through carefully. I haven't had time or the books to check his calculations, but they must be wrong. I've proved a number of big errors."

Prince interrupted him with a grin.

"I told you it was a bad book to trust!"

Nat smiled. "It isn't a book at all! That's the joke. The mathematical tables in the back are not recast for navigator's use—they haven't anything to do with convenience as far as a ship's uses go. And half the tables that might be there are omitted. What Moore has done is this"—Nat's eyes sparkled, and he leaned forward over the table—"he has copied some old book on astronomy into the first part, and into the second he has dumped a series of outworn, inaccurate mathematical tables. And his rules and methods must fit those two things he has copied. They are all wrong."

"He never worked out what a ship needs," put in Prince.

"Yes," reflected Nat, his voice lowering, "that's exactly it. A whole new book needs to be written distinctly for the navigation of a ship. It is folly to think

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of making a sailor an astronomer, an academician. I have read so much in that style, that I can almost recognize the books Moore has used."

"Well," returned Prince, "you have at least one problem in this: Chronometers will never be popular with Yankee ship owners. They cost too much."

"I can overcome that," said Nat, "by inventing a new method of lunar observation. I don't see how just now, but when I am at my books again I'll not be long in working it out. Any old clock will do, even if a chronometer is always better. Owners will not be slow to buy chronometers when they see a profit in dollars with clocks."

Prince leaned back against the cabin wall and lighted a cheroot slowly, and with affectionate care. "How'll you start?" he asked finally.

"I shan't begin by writing my own book," said Nat, his forehead flushed with the tide of this new enthusiasm. "I'll write Mr. Blunt in Newburyport, and offer to revise Moore's book, straighten out the antique tables and figures. I must wait until I have perfected my lunar observation for my own book. Oh, I've thought of it a lot these nights; it all seems so possible, and such a great thing to do. A *new* thing. It would—" Nat hesitated—"make me believe I was somebody."

Prince smoked his cheroot, deep in thought. "If you succeed, Nat—if you succeed, have you thought what that means? Other men will design big ships that may sail faster than these we know now. Nathan Reed's ridiculous teapot craft—yes, even that—but no matter what happens—always your thing will last. With that book you plan, any ship—no matter how fast—can be

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sailed faster. So models of ships will come, and new ones replace these. But all will look to your idea."

"If I can do it," said Nat, "if I live to do it. You know, at night sometimes, I think about it, and my heart starts to pound, as though I were to die before I could work it all through. A scheme of navigation is the beginning of what I want to do, of the things I will find out."

II

After this conversation with Nat, thoughts of his intense eyes returned to Henry Prince often. Here in Nat Bowditch might be something grander, more important, than the utmost designers of ships could ever do—because a straight line would forever be the shortest distance between two points.

It might come to mean more, in the end, to the maritime growth of the States—this idea stewing in a supercargo's mind—than any other item of technique or superior skill in the departments of seamanship or construction. No breed of vessels could be born which might not be made the swifter and surer by the practical evolution of Nat's purpose. Navigation would ascend from a half-hearted reliance to an authentic guide. Then perhaps the advantages of chronometers and perfected sextants would be seen.

The thing that motivated Henry Prince most deeply, he frankly confessed to himself, was the sense of personal advantage. An observant life in Salem, among the wealthy few who owned ships, had displayed this to him.

He was not only amused and attracted to Nat for his youthful and naïve espousals of numbers upon

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every occasion, but now, out of the clear recital of the boy's purpose, he had found living tissue where his grafted affection took root and sprouted. He could not keep thought of Nat from his mind, whenever it fell into a planning mood. If only Nat would carry through, and not go wild or fling off at a fevered, irrational tangent.

Henry Prince chewed at an unlighted Manilla cheroot that twisted about between the straight line of his lips.

That was the deuce of it. Nat might simply explode. Prince realized how little he knew of the inner action in this mind of Nat, what subtle currents, what forces he could not recognize, had brought him thus far. He was reminded again of the sense of Nat that he had had, the evening in the Sun Tavern after he had struck the glass from Nat's hand. As Nat walked toward the door . . . as though moving no human course.

But Nat must not go "queer," he must not explode. An unnatural excess of feeling toward numbers, this insane notion of numbers as religion and justice—was indeed a dangerous fuse. A man could not exist in this way. There was something deathly in Nat's passion for certitude. Prince felt uneasy about it.

If he should receive command of the *Astrea*, Prince would make it the vessel of accomplishment—Nat's figures could prove their cause in the *Astrea*, under his command. Nat was essential to the project, and his value would be both direct and indirect. There was this: Nat could serve as an excellent confidence between Derby and himself. Prince must try to enlist Derby in the scheme of navigation through its likeness to a per-

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manent investment; changing maritime fashion could inflict the central idea with little damage. As Nat said, figures didn't change, they remained the same. A straight line was always the shortest distance. It was all so true, so obvious—Elias Derby's shrewd attention would not be unexcited. But the handling of Derby's attention must not be inept . . .

Henry Prince sighed. Another fuse was woman. Woman in Salem: an ornament set in a hundred conventions, the first trace of whose outline Nat could not comprehend. That was a real danger . . . He watched Nat walking the leeward deck, gazing over the dark seas in the direction of probable landfall.

Henry Prince took his cheroot from his mouth and called him aft.

After a few remarks about ship's business, Prince spoke to Nat of the concern he had for his future.

"What did you mean, Nat, that night last summer, in the Sun Tavern, when you drank a toast—to the unknown quantity?"

Nat's face darkened with crimson. "That," he began hesitantly, "that is simply a mathematical expression."

Prince continued his gaze forward, where several men hovered against the night sky, on the break of the foc'sle head. "Yes," Prince returned, musing. "I understand that. And I took it to be a girl. I want to ask you a favor. Nat, I want you to talk over any marriage you may be thinking of—with me, before it happens."

Nat protested, obviously confused. But Prince went on talking evenly.

"Your cousin, Mary Ingersoll, your Uncle Jonathan's daughter, will grow to be the kind of woman to

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help you in your work, and plan for your career. And she will have money; old Jonathan, for all his sulphur, has been packing it away, dollar by dollar, all these years. Consider more that side of it. Women can be the devil, they can turn you into nothing." Prince smiled faintly. "You remember Dark Day? Once you told me you could never forget the blinding, awesome terror you felt in the fields. If you fall in love, as they say, and drink to the unknown—you drink to your own destruction."

Nat stood silently. His face was averted shoreward. Prince saw his body slowly straighten in the darkness. "You mean, sir, that I should do as you do, and sit uncomfortable hours out in the meeting house of a Sunday in the hope of some bright smile from under a bonnet on the way home?"

"I mean," replied Prince with emphasis, "that if you intend to marry, you should deal with it in the only safe way that is open to you. Like a sum in ciphering." With a slight laugh, Prince added, "It is odd that I should have to persuade you, of all people, to the value of numbers."

Nat would not be put off. "Marriage to my cousin is a good example," he remarked; "to you then, it is simply a business arrangement?"

"The most complex in Salem," returned Prince helplessly, as he turned from Nat.

Chapter Fourteen

I

ON January eleventh, precisely a year from the day of her departure, the *Henry* stood off Salem Harbor waiting the flood tide. At dawn she had struck a snow squall which had not lifted its mantle of softly blowing white until noon. The sun had slowly pierced the pearl of the sky, only to cloud over again with a rising wind from the north.

But gradually, from one partly seen landfall to another, Prince had craftily worked his vessel along the coast to the familiar rocks off Marblehead, and thence edged in toward the dim lines of Salem Harbor.

To Nat, who stood against the rail in the forward waist of the ship, the day seemed unnaturally hushed and still. A heavy ground-swell rolling in from the eastward tipped the old hull of the *Henry* slowly back and forth as she rode along under easy sail, feeling her way and waiting the favoring flood tide that would sweep her in, up against the ice coated side of the Derby wharf.

He wondered if the *Henry* had been sighted during her maneuvers off shore and a runner dispatched to the town. Elizabeth would know of the *Henry's* approach—she would be among the first to know, he felt sure. She would be there on the snow-crueted wharf planks,

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her breath making eager marks in the cold air. He found himself smiling, foolishly. His mouth straightened, and he turned his ear impatiently to the curl and wash away from the *Henry's* blunt bows as she rose and fell, slowly moving inshore.

He watched Henry Prince, his throat tightly wrapped in a huge red muffler of wool as he restlessly paced the quarterdeck uttering now and again a sharp word of command to the helmsman, or raising his silver speaking trumpet to his lips, bellowing to the mate forward, or to the men aloft in the rigging.

Always after snow at sea there seems to fall a quiet stillness over the ocean; its gray water seems to spread out with a new immensity. Nat felt this. He trembled. For there, over the starboard bow, he could make out the white of a steeple against the gray sky, and the shapes of the snow-covered roofs.

His breath caught in his chest with a queer pain as the ship drifted him nearer the town whose every street and house and store were so familiar to him. He thought of the Square under its smooth white blanket of snow, of people making their way over the crunching snow, down to the wharf to greet the new arrival. His heart beat fiercely, and quieted with slowing unsteady beats.

Elizabeth! In his mind, he remembered with sudden vividness her slim form, her quick straight eyes. "You are carrying too much sail, Nat!" she had said.

What would she say now, when he showed her the plan he had to navigate ships? She would understand then. Elizabeth the remote, the beautiful, to whom he had opened his heart—she would respect him. She would understand why he was different from other

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young men she knew, why he had set himself apart, alone, to struggle with mathematics. Her father was a captain—he too would understand, and respect him. He would nod approvingly.

It would be hard indeed for a man to know all the steps of the quadrille, and accomplish great things too. No, the search of new knowledge, the building by mathematics, was queer. You had to know every side of each step as you went along. That meant you had to know what other men had done to be sure. There was no time to master the quadrille, it seemed. Elizabeth ought to understand that.

And now—slowly he was coming home to Salem. Already the lines of the Derby wharf were clear. He could see the knot of people gathered close at the end of the stringpiece. He fancied now and then that they were waving. He saw the clustered masts of the other ships against the familiar steeple, the cupolas. Aloft, a few of the men broke into a chantey as they moved along the foot-ropes, furling the sails. Forward, capstan bars were inserted in the capstan-head. Hawasers and harbor fasts were laid out in lines and coils along the deck. Prince was planning to glide up within heaving distance of the pierhead, pass out a line, then slowly lose headway and warp the old ship in by the capstan.

Nat would see who was there—he would see Elizabeth! Gradually oblivious of the activity on the deck about him, his eyes focused on the knot of people now waving to the returning vessel. Nat remembered with a burning forehead that night by the Square, what he had said, Elizabeth's nod of promise.

There was a sudden shout from Prince, and a sailor

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forward heaved a light line. It fell short, with a splash into the water. The sailor recovered it, coiling it quickly in his hand for another throw. . . . A minute passed. Nat had seen every face. He had scanned every muffled figure on the wharf, and Elizabeth was not there.

It could mean only one thing. Elizabeth never missed an arrival. Her absence meant one thing. She did not want to see Nat. She had repented her nod that far-away night by the Square, the waving farewell with her blue merino shawl that seemed to pledge so irrevocably a waving welcome home.

Nat's eyes suddenly filled with hot tears as he stood clutching the rail. An unbearable sick dizziness bore against his eyes. Cold as it was, he felt he was sweating. He could not realize what had happened, although his reason told him clearly. . . . Elizabeth had broken faith, she was not here. She knew he would understand her absence. . . .

Now a hawser was fast, and the crew were tramping around the capstan inching the *Henry* in to the wharf-side by the dripping hawser. The steady tramp of their feet was marked out by the iron clang as the catch pins fell with the revolving capstan. There were cheers and calls back and forth between ship and shore, eager voices crying a piece of news, asking an eager question. And the regular clank of the revolving capstan reëchoing—reëchoing against the human voices, as though it were marking out the hours Nat had spent for nothing, for work whose final count would now be hollow.

Elizabeth! Nat almost cried out his sudden anguish, but caught his lips in time. He turned from the wharf-

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side, and stumbled down below. Groping, he found his bunk, and fell across it. In the excitement of landing, the others had not noticed his disappearance from the deck.

He was alone below, prone on his bunk, where each night he had reckoned his dream of achievement against the fluttering spot of blue that would welcome him home. Dry sobs wrenched his narrow shoulders.

II

The *Henry's* voyage was done, and aloft her canvas brailed up. The broad beaten wake that had lain white on her ocean track was scattered; long ago its foam had disappeared, and there were again only the sliding colorless crests of unbroken water.

A placid pool of Salem Harbor lay under the old hull—a pool as black as night and without reflection. Occasional ripples broke at the horn timber with the incoming tide, others spread out from the ice-fringed piling of the adjacent Derby wharf. These were now the only living exchanges between hull and water, and these in shadowed secret.

From several bare yards tackles depended, and periodically hoisted cargo of sugar and East India merchandise from the uncovered hatches of the hold.

Elias Derby had been pleased with the unexpected return of the *Henry*. Several vessels were long overdue in Boston, and the prices of Eastern cargoes had mounted swiftly in that port as well as in Salem. It had turned out an excellent decision of her commander to accumulate a cargo at the Isle of Bourbon instead of driving into the East itself. Chance had multiplied

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the profit that might have been had from direct trade had the *Henry* traveled to the full limit of her proposed voyage. Speed of return, in the light of this experience, seemed more than ever desirable.

Henry Prince was not slow to realize the advantage this circumstance had given his plan, and the upper tier of the *Henry's* hold had hardly been cleared when Prince directed his steps to the Derby counting-room, and sought an interview with the man who held the maritime fortunes of Salem in his hand.

Prince had tried to persuade Nat to go with him; for if the proposals should excite Derby to an angry wrath, then Nat could be placed between him and Derby by a few diplomatic sentences, and draw the sting of that fatal anger into his own system. Nat could be counted on to challenge any disagreement of Derby that was not sound—and with Nat there in case Derby should turn a choleric eye on the plan, it would be easy indeed for Prince to escape with a whole skin.

But ever since the disappointment on the day of landing, Nat had shown a curious apathy toward the whole scheme. He cared no longer for the success of his earlier enthusiasm. His deep-set eyes seemed to have lost their vision. Prince might speculate on the cause, but Nat was silent under his questioning.

Prince rubbed his rather large nose, and buttoned up his new plum-colored vest. Perhaps Nat was bilious from the change in food, anyhow, it would be better for Nat not to have him come along.

Prince did not know that Nat's apathy was despair. Desperately keeping the secret of his hurt, Nat never mentioned Elizabeth's name.

And so Henry Prince was left to fortify his daring

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resolve by glancing down at his new plum-colored vest as he walked down the wharf holding another pinch of snuff at his nose.

III

Elias Derby, on the morning of Prince's visit, had been somewhat crossed by news of success that had come to his ears of his former clerk, William Gray. He also had made an arrival in this time of high prices. The tip of Derby's Manila cheroot was tasteless, and generous pinches of Eliot's snuff seemed unable to produce their customary convulsive delights.

The January thaw had come at noon, and Salem streets were wet underfoot. Elias had not inherited a taste for claret from his father for nothing; the damp had touched his gouty knee, and made sudden movements of his body intolerably annoying. It was well enough to be the richest man in the United States, but it brought with it so many affairs, so many vexing matters, that had nothing to do with ships. There was the difficult Jeffersonian game that was being played in place of the sober, aristocratic certitude of General Washington and Federalism. The welfare of the country rested on its ten-million-dollar foreign trade, and Derby felt uneasy about Jefferson's overconfident attitude in foreign affairs. The New England merchants were left unconsulted while a rabble of uncouth and fiery counselors surrounded the Jeffersonian chair, fighting among themselves.

Before Prince was admitted, Elias withdrew his silent stare from a stained corner of the ceiling, and asked for the invoices and ladings of the *Henry's* voyage. It was one thing to have energetic young men to

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drive hard bargains in far parts of the world, to have these young men in positions of command; it was distinctly another to satisfy the private scheme which each captain had decided was the way to untold wealth, and to make these private schemes fit into his broad plan of foreign commerce. Prince had probably come to insist that he be given a ship and trading dollars to visit some unheard-of archipelago where gold hung from trees in chunks like bananas.

Prince drew in his loose-fitting vest as he crossed the threshold into Derby's presence, and returned the defensive greeting of his chief with a smile.

The older man gestured him to a seat on the other side of the pine table that was always covered with charts and manifests, on which the freshly inked ladings of the *Henry* had just been spread.

While Prince blew his nose, attending to the needs of each nostril separately after the fashion of the day, he glanced craftily at the hard, vertical visage in front of him, its boldly marked brows and sagging cheeks. Elias Derby's eyes were disturbing. One was blue and the other brown by an odd freak of nature.

Derby made an abrupt movement with his hand, and began to speak directly, in the tone of a busy man who is forced to pause.

"These dullard politicians will force an embargo down our throats, captain, before we know it. That is the only support such high-handed speeches can receive. Starve England—starve France—and that will mean starving America first."

"I suppose you must consider many questions of that sort, Mr. Derby," ventured Prince.

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"Yes, but my conclusions are not sought." Derby sighed, and stroked the back of his hand reflectively.

Prince noticed the brown spots on it; he could not take his eye from these liver spots. They had paralyzed his tongue suddenly, and confused him more the longer he looked at them, and the slow movements those hands continually made.

Derby glanced at the preliminary figures of the *Henry's* cargo.

"You made an excellent voyage, captain," he remarked, "and I especially like the clear inventory of your cargo. Half the time I do not know what is in the hold of a ship until her entire cargo is laid out on the dock. Young Bowditch made these lists? I remember, he sailed with you."

"He did, sir," returned Prince. What better opportunity than this to make the proposal for the *Astrea*? But somehow, being in the presence of Elias Derby had sapped the daring from his spine. Not yet, reasoned Prince; their conversation must be worked to the point a little later.

"What is the talk, Mr. Derby," questioned Prince, "about the use of larger ships? Have the schemes of Briggs come to anything since I sailed? Do you consider these East Indiamen they talk of at all practical or possible?"

Derby flushed, and glanced directly at Prince. With his hand closed into a fist, he answered.

"I know this about all trade," he muttered between his teeth: "that it should be done as quickly as possible—each cargo complete in the shortest time. I know also that places where trade has been good in the past should be visited regularly—as often as possible, even

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at the expense of ignoring more remote places that might serve well once or twice. To visit many ports, I need a number of small ships, rather than fewer larger ones. To do this quickly, a bark like the *Henry* is ideal."

Prince thought this moment the most opportune he might encounter. "Mr. Derby," he began, with tight resolution in his throat and the memory of the academic Gibaut's fate before his eyes, "Mr. Derby, if I could show you a way of taking a heavy ship where the smaller one goes, and farther, in better time, would you be interested?"

"Of course, captain," murmured Derby suspiciously.

"There is the example of the *Astrea*, which you have always considered too heavy a ship," began Prince. "She is now being refitted to sail again?"

"You are correctly informed, captain. But that is merely to prove to my rebellious captains, once and for all, that a heavy ship is useless luggage."

Prince felt he must disregard Derby's antagonism, and go straight to the point. "Her sails can be made larger than the plan—they can be balanced, and increased. But wait—" Prince saw Derby's hand rise to cut him short. "Is that a chart of Sunda Straits and the track up from Isle de France?" Prince motioned toward a chart under Derby's fist.

"On that long track," went on Prince, "with an adverse monsoon, it is wiser to lay over at the Isle de France than to trust to dead reckoning and guesswork to tell you where you are. The currents, and successive tacking back and forth, confuse every master making Java Head. They sail twice the distance that they would sail if they had an accurate position each day."

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Derby drew in his lip. "Navigation!" he exploded. "Yes, young Bowditch has infected a thorough seagoing captain with his figures. I see. But, Captain Prince, I will tell you now what is an insult to a person of your experience: figures at sea give a master only false confidence."

Prince nodded in ready agreement. "Yes, it is better to sail with no chart along a treacherous coast, and rely on what you see, than to trust one that may be incorrectly drawn. But young Bowditch's navigation is accurate."

"You would have all my ships adopt it?" queried Derby, incredulous. "Is that why you came to me? First you must teach arithmetic to your brother officers, and make professors out of them. And by that time they will be useless in action. Too much thinking and study never made a commander, captain. I'm surprised that you should think so."

Prince faltered. He did not know how to answer this. "Nat Bowditch begged me to present this plan to you," he began, half to himself. "Perhaps I have lost my sense of proportion from listening to his argument. He is very young indeed, and not at all wise in matters of the world. I should have compared this idea with others he has."

"Pray, sir, tell me what other ideas this young man has," replied Derby sharply.

Prince had no time to think. He answered without reflection.

"He would do away with religion, sir," returned Prince, his ingenuity for other less dramatic answer failing. "Once he told me that the vague zigzag of Christian ritual was in as bad a case as the blind Chris-

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tian navigation. He said a man must not look to God except through a sextant."

Derby startled Prince by a sudden laugh.

"I am almost tempted to help that boy," said Derby, "and to believe in him. But, seriously, his devotion to figures is so remarkable that we must not judge him too harshly. Remember he knows little but those figures. A very queer young man. Of course he knows nothing of the darker tides of life which the worship of God purifies and holds in check. If he could teach all my captains to cipher as well as he does, I should trust my vessels to his formulas for navigation. But come, captain, we are wandering from the point. It is too absurd for me to believe you did not have more on your mind than this matter."

Prince reached for his snuffbox, but could not find it. He wrinkled the edge of a chart in his fingers.

Derby made an impatient movement. "What is it, captain?"

This was the vital question Prince had been waiting for. Now that it had come, so much more than he had intended had entered the conversation, Prince feared his request would seem preposterous. But there was no time to consider a new attack. Elias Derby had grown to be not unlike an emperor. His attention could be held for only a certain time. Prince would have to come to the point.

"A big ship, sir," he muttered quickly.

"Damn my eyes, Captain Prince!" thundered Derby, his cheeks flushed and showing a fine network of purple lines. "In the next breath I suppose you'll ask for command of the *Astrea*!"

Henry Prince swallowed. It would never do to let

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down an inch on this man; just as a relaxed hold on a rope for a moment's breath would snatch it from your hands, so in dealing with this apoplectic autocrat each grip must be firmer.

"I do want the *Astrea*, sir."

The two men sitting on opposite sides of the table exchanged a continued stare. Prince gripped the sides of his chair with his calloused palms, in a growing panic to see what Derby would do.

Prince saw the blood mount slowly to his chief's forehead, and spread across it in a red band. Derby suddenly twisted his chair about under him, and sat silently gazing out of the window opposite Prince, out over the docks and the harborside.

Prince felt he must say something. Anything—to break the silence.

"Do you realize, sir, that if we can once prove a method of navigation to be accurate, dependable, what prosperity will follow—all to the credit of your name? Mr. Derby of Salem always discovers the new thing. And this will establish your fame for posterity, for if Nat arrives at his idea on this voyage, it will never fade out of use as long as ships sail. An epoch-making voyage to the East in the heavy *Astrea*—just this once, sir—give me the craft but for this one voyage—"

Derby suddenly faced Prince. His face was inscrutable again, and betrayed no trace of the anger that had marked its contorted creases before. What a fool he had been! thought Henry Prince, as he regarded the stone-cold eyes that stared at him out of Derby's skull. What a fool to have talked on so about Nat, to have used these valuable moments to expand that chance! Did he believe in Nat more than in himself? Had he

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been subtly infected deeper than he knew by the calm, unswerving purpose of the boy? Great heavens, it was too impossible! Himself of all people, a daring schemer, and bold maker of plans, to have been caught this way—below the waterline as it were! The plea to Derby for the command of the *Astrea* was too absurd on the framework he had laid. Somehow he had been tricked. He had not meant to draw Nat in a second time; he had been tricked into it somehow, obscurely; and it was too late now to withdraw. He had chanced all on the moment; that far he had been right, he knew.

Derby began to speak. "You have made a very successful voyage in the *Henry*, Captain Prince. I had planned to confirm your temporary command."

Was the old fossil without feeling, that he did not know what rested on his words? Prince's very heart seemed to beat the query up into his eyes.

Derby sighed wearily, then he began to speak.

"What you tell me of Nat Bowditch may be of very real importance. More than either you or I realize." Derby lowered his eyes for a moment. "His mother was a brave woman. When my father was alive and she lived out in Danvers, both my father and I did what we could to help her. I think, Captain Prince, I can tell you this on the strictest oath of a gentleman's honor to confidence—that—that—she was beautiful as a young girl. I was going to say more—but that, all that, is so long ago . . . But come, come. We were talking of Nat. As I understand, his big work is to write a book; just that, a book a seaman can use. And that is something new. I believe it impossible, but if he could spring the trick, there would be long years of exact navigation, as you say. It will conquer unknown oceans

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in the hands of hardened seamen. And to do this book Nat must first find a satisfactory method of making a lunar observation, that is the core of it."

Elias Derby paused. The blood in Henry Prince's head seemed ready to burst his temples.

Derby went on quietly. "All that is stirring news. And again, it may come to nothing. But, Captain Prince, what has all this to do with your command of the *Astrea*?"

Henry Prince was half out of his chair, his body tensed with anger at himself. It was the only time his lips had been impotent in speech—and at the very crisis of his career.

Derby motioned Prince to sit back in his chair and be at ease. He was silent again for some moments, looking absently at the wall of his counting-room, the stains on the yellow paint, and the half-models of hulls fastened there.

"I will see, Captain Prince, whether we can arrange it. I think I understand your temper just now. But it was I who drove you off the course, perhaps, of what you might have said—through something that happened to me when I heard, and seemed suddenly to see, a promise in young Nat, even while I was laughing at it. It recalled Mary Bowditch, how she hoped for some such thing, and what she gave toward it. And I know I'm getting old, must be, for such an impossible fancy—this one of navigation, to be seriously in my mind. Here I have talked like a sentimental old man, and not like an owner, to one of the younger captains. You must forget all I have said—I can't explain it."

Henry Prince was bewildered, astonished utterly, to have seen the engraved face of the most powerful

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visage in Salem open and expand thus simply in their talk, as though Derby, too, had been touched obscurely, by the power of devotion and concentration that lay in Nat. Prince's mind was full of wonder; the *Astrea* had almost vanished from the edges of his mind.

Derby indicated with a gesture that it was time for him to go. Prince rose, and took Elias Derby's outstretched hand.

"I think I can arrange for you to have the *Astrea* on her next voyage. I had planned to have her at sea in two months. Is that a long enough rest ashore for you?"

IV

Nat's official occupation as supercargo of the *Henry* ended with her unloading. Checking each barrel and bundle as it came out of the hold was at first a work that required exacting attention, but after a few days, conversation with the wharfinger became possible in odd moments. From that well-informed personage of the dock he received with vague interest the news of the town and its stray lines of gossip. It seemed entertaining now to hear items that he once would have let slip without attention.

Jacob and Ben Crowninshield were coming to marriageable age, and the town was quite focused on the track of their attentions; for an alliance unfavorable to the Derby family might come to mean a mercantile rift in Salem. There appeared, however, little chance of this, to judge from the present doorsteps favored by the two youths. The wharfinger's wife was active in the church, and at the week-day meetings of the Female Charitable Society the more formal ob-

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servations of Sunday's services were compared and embellished. It could be confidently prophesied, the wharfinger remarked, that Jacob would marry Sarah Gardner by June, and Sarah's mother had been a Derby. As for Ben—he had been increasingly attentive to Captain Boardman's daughters. Whether Elizabeth, who was frail and a spitfire, or her more languid sister, Mary, was his object few could be found to hazard for certainty. Ben led at the cotillion, however, with Elizabeth.

Mention of this last situation started a throbbing hurt in Nat's chest. He remembered the blue merino shawl. Elizabeth had talked as though her admiration could be only for a sailor who had covered distant oceans. She had given him to understand that—her smile, her coming to the wharf at his departure.

Nat remembered with a wave of feeling his declaration to her by the Square, and the silence he had kept after it. In being companioned by Ben Crowninshield she had not denied a phrase of her unspoken promise, the response Nat believed he had seen underneath her rapid talk of ships.

But she had not been on the Derby Wharf when the *Henry* warped in. To have merely deserted an arrival, Nat judged, would be enough indication to observe that her tastes had changed to the course of the infrequent ball. In the light of what the wharfinger said, the irony of Nat's position seemed underlined and bitter.

He tried to kill off the recurring images of Elizabeth rooted in his mind through the year-long voyage. He had not seen her since his return. Had she changed? he wondered.

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The wharfinger went on to tell of Nathan Reed's prosperity, and of a factory Reed planned to construct in Danvers for the stamping of nails by machine. As soon as the frost had given up its grip, foundations were to be started. Nat felt little inclination to seek Reed out.

Henry Prince seemed to have forgotten the *Henry*. Nat saw him seldom in these days of unloading. He appeared always to be hurrying down Liberty Street or up Neptune or Derby, on some errand of importance.

Nat had again taken up his lodging with the Hodges, and the friendliness of their family circle at the evening meal, for a time, allayed his growing sense of isolation. But it was not long before this household deadened its own warmth, with its small talk and gossip. Nat's loneliness took him gradually into deep niches of depression, inexplicable to him.

There was, however, the attic room at the Hodges, and his books and rush-light . . . Moore's "Navigator," it seemed had borrowed its methods from Robertson's "Elements" and its tables from the "Requisite Tables" of Dr. Maskelyne, an official of the Greenwich Observatory. The result was that the rules made for observatory practice were left intact, and the needs of a shipmaster bent out of shape to meet what was available. Incomplete, unsuited, Nat saw at once. Inaccurate, he believed he would be able to show in more than a few instances. A new beginning . . . Nat set himself at his work almost out of habit. With increasing attention as his duties on board the *Henry* diminished, he sought new results from his figuring.

But always—quite inevitably it seemed—there crept into the most important moments of his concentration

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the picture of Elizabeth's face. . . . Unaccountably, one night while bent over his books, he suddenly burst into tears.

V

It was February before Henry Prince came to visit Nat. Prince spoke eagerly of his definite appointment to the command of the *Astrea*; he seemed full of a happy prosperity over the glamorous voyage he planned.

Nat listened attentively, but without asking many questions. It all sounded very golden and fine indeed—but to what end? It occurred to him that perhaps Derby was just making a tool of Prince, to prove his convictions by Prince's failure. The important thing to Nat was his mathematics.

Nat had dispatched a letter to Blunt, the publisher of the American edition of Moore's "Navigator," proposing to undertake some revisions, and indicating something of his hope for a future work of his own. A quick reply had been received stating Blunt's immediate interest in such a proposal, and saying that he must talk to Nat on his next trip to Salem, which he had been putting off from day to day.

But the Newburyport printer had not yet arrived.

"Come, Nat," said Prince, "what do you expect? That shouldn't depress you. The trouble is that you're lonely. Why not go out to Danvers to visit the Ingersolls for a time, and forget these books?"

"No," returned Nat, "I don't want to go to Danvers. I'd simply hear again what I said on the day of Mary's christening—'Slap the baby, make it cry.' What's the use? Uncle Jonathan thinks that a great joke."

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"Well," returned Prince, "it doesn't matter especially to me, but I'd rather not see you so depressed. Think of the life your cousin must lead as the only child of a fanatic like old Jonathan Ingersoll! She is fully as charming as any girl in Salem, and perhaps would receive your attentions with surprising gratitude."

Nat disregarded the friendly banter in Prince's words. He shook his head impatiently.

"But, man—you can't live alone!" cut in Prince. "A sailor's life is too lonely as it is—you should think of marrying. You would be so much happier—take a zest in life."

Nat smiled. "And become excited about our voyage on the *Astrea*?"

"I see how they might go together," remarked Prince. "If you thought of marriage with your cousin, I've no doubt your Uncle Jonathan might give up his rooted prejudice against the sea, and maybe place a few dollars to your credit, which you could use in trade. A voyage such as the *Astrea's* will be means a certain tenfold return. You would be rich."

"And happy," put in Nat with a twist of his mouth. "Don't forget that was your starting point," he added with malicious logic.

Prince threw up his hands. "Make a game of what I say if you want, Nat. I can't make out what's the matter with you." He grunted. "I'm telling you the shrewdest way to act for your advantage—a possibility that fairly glitters if you consider it well. It is a truly advantageous match. A woman would take your mind off yourself. You're moping around here."

"You speak coldly of these things," Nat replied.

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"In the first place I hardly know my cousin. I haven't seen her for nearly two years."

"But you know your uncle, and what life must be like with him."

"You mean," said Nat dryly, "my cousin Mary would think of life with me as a less burdensome duty, and hence acceptable? Is that love?"

"Now you are very silly, Nat. You mustn't consider romantic things, but practical policy. Believe me, you'll pay for disobeying what your head dictates. Are you strung up by the idea that you must be in love? A purely French notion, Nat, like the quadrille. What is love?"

"Love," returned Nat, "is something you *feel*. A girl is so beautiful you must think about her all the time."

With this slowly given answer to his question about love, Henry Prince appeared ready to talk of other things. Some shade of expression that he caught in Nat's voice, a sudden contraction about his eyes, warned Prince. He recurred to his favorite topic, the chances for the *Astrea* to touch the hitherto unreached Manila with great profit. The English, he said, had a spasmodic trade there, the Dutch too, and Boston reached it by the arduous voyage around the Horn.

"Now Salem," said Prince, "and by Salem's route of Good Hope and Java Head."

But Nat's attention had wandered from Prince. He was oblivious to Prince's presence. His mind was on Elizabeth. He could not forget her; he wondered if she had changed from the slim figure he had known to the frail intense young lady who so personally knew all that went on in the harbor. He had not seen her

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once. True, he had not gone far from the Hodges' home, nor often, but it was strange. She might be sick; that might be the answer, the explanation of her absence.

If she were sick, he thought swiftly, why had not the Hodges told him, why had no one let him know? But no, he thought, why should they? The strange attachment between them was Nat's own secret. He would go to the Boardman house! He would go that very afternoon. He felt his face flush with eagerness, and was suddenly conscious of Henry Prince's presence.

He looked at Prince, and stammered, then rose jerkily and caught Prince's hand.

"I can finish the 'Practical Navigator' on this voyage," Nat said. "I will do it, and put down in the book nothing I can't teach the crew. We will show Salem that it is no matter of deep book learning to navigate a ship! We will make it a famous voyage."

Prince stood up, and looked with sudden wonder at the feverish impatience that animated Nat's thin features, the eagerness of his eyes.

There was no accounting for this boy! Suddenly he had forgotten his work, lost interest—nothing could excite him or stir him. And now Nat was alive again with a craftsman's zeal to be at his work. Prince stayed on in Nat's room for a while longer, talking of trading schemes, and listening to Nat's plans for a new kind of navigation. At last when he left, he was still puzzled, but vastly relieved and infected with a light-hearted hope for great things to come.

Within an hour after Prince's leaving, Nat was standing at the brick path that led to the Boardman front door. Not until he approached the door, and

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the miniature brass anchor that served as a knocker, did he realize vividly the possibility of meeting Ben Crown-inshield. Or perhaps Captain Boardman would swing open the door. With his heart beating fast, he sounded the knocker.

Elizabeth herself answered his nervous, quick knock.

Nat saw her for an instant, her frail body framed in the high fan of the door frame, her arm outstretched on the door handle, as a creature of another world.

Blindly he stumbled across the threshold, unable to speak, or to look at anything but her face.

Elizabeth's face told the story of her illness, her absence from the wharves, in a glance. Her face, her throat, seemed thin, and powder white, while her lips were unnaturally bright. Her wrist was so frail—Nat could see the clear marking of blue veins on the back of her outstretched hand. He was suddenly humbled.

She was smiling at him with an odd and gracious maturity of manner that left Nat even more deeply at a loss. Always in his memory of her, Elizabeth had seemed to be smiling; the composed, subtle acceptance in the curve of her lips he saw now bewildered him.

"I have been sick," she murmured, "lung fever. But I have heard so much of your voyage. I wanted to see you."

Her eyes lighted brilliantly as she looked at Nat, with a warmth that seemed a part of the bewildering certainty shown by the curve of her lips.

"Yes," Nat at length replied, "we have been through with unloading some time now. It was a fortunate voyage, as they go now. But you—I did not know you had been sick—"

Elizabeth was moving ahead of Nat now, toward the

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large room at the rear of the house. She smiled over her shoulder. "You expected me at the wharf?" She gave a low laugh. "I've had to have the news of the waterfront quite second-hand these days. Perhaps next week they will allow me outside again."

Except for the mulatto woman who spread the curtains at the window that overlooked the garden, Elizabeth was alone. Her family, she explained, were at a funeral. Nat realized he and Elizabeth would have several pleasant hours to talk together, for before the final commitment to earth, there would be many prayers. Nat knew before the final handfuls of loose earth fell on the hollow coffin there would be long eulogies. . . . He tried to realize the good fortune that had so easily arranged his visit, but at every reflection his mind was put to rout by the overwhelming shock of hearing Elizabeth's voice again. Then the security of Elizabeth's smile was so resistless, yet seemingly so acquiescent.

She sat in her father's chair of carved teak, with the ends of a pale yellow shawl of China crêpe drawn forward from the back of her neck, the two ends held lightly in her hands as they rested below her breast. The slight tension that the weight of her wrists gave to the shawl made it fit against and draw over the curve of her body. The slight depressions in the forward pit of the shoulders showed the slimness of her body and accented the round base of her breasts.

If she thought of this—who could tell? Perhaps the mulatto woman who laced her and received directions. Not Nat! He could not hope to overcome the glowing center of her eyes. His look fell off their very

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surface and dropped as though pulled by the slight tension visible in the silken folds of the shawl.

Nat was timid in the face of an attention as free and suave as Elizabeth's. But he had a gift for blindness. A curious, almost spectacular blindness to all save the central current, the line projected from his mind, often eliminated a surrounding circumstance.

In the tavern when he had heard Ben Crowninshield take so ugly an advantage of Elizabeth, he could avert a cheap brawl about it through the fact that while he took it in as a connection of words, the cruelty and meanness of Ben's attitude did not really strike him, or move him to act.

This blindness gave him a concentration, and a kind of freedom and effect of daring, like an instinct.

"My mathematics," he was saying, "must be of slight interest to you. I mean, a geometric figure must seem lifeless to you—so different from a ship. Yet I'm thinking of ships a great deal now, and how their courses may be reduced to a straight line."

Elizabeth leaned back slightly in the carved chair, as though she were pressing her body back against the dark-grained wood in restraint. "I do see, Nat. I'm interested in what happens to your plan."

One hand fell in her lap, and the other rose obliquely from the heavy arm of the chair, to support her oval face. Inwardly, no doubt, Elizabeth had been stirred, and flattered to receive the serious attention Nat gave her eyes and voice and every move. Nat, in her mind, was wound back into mysterious distances and measurements and books, just as Ben Crowninshield wound back eventually to a bolt of English broadcloth.

Broadcloth was the more recognizable and tactile.

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Ben was not all broadcloth. In '91 he had commanded the *Henry*, with a crew of eight men, to the Isle de France. Most of his crew were under twenty-one, Ben himself only nineteen. But, in Salem, this was not unusual. Nat's mind remained the stranger of the two.

Elizabeth, with a dim uneasiness that was faintly pleasurable, remembered the evening on Pleasant Street, by the Square, where Nat had stopped her—and—back—earlier—in the field. Her illness seemed to have simplified her; she was more passive, more receptive, than before. The hundred Salem conventions seemed to drift at times from her. It was not an easy separation, and it was not miraculous. Lying listlessly in bed, she had taken long strands of speculative and fanciful thought about her body. She had thought a great deal about her body as she slowly recovered and moved about the house again. . . . Now, she simply said what was in her mind, exactly, without effort.

"The *Astrea* will be sailing now in less than a week, to the Far East—a first direct trip to Manila from Salem."

Elizabeth leaned forward, struck by an idea.

"There is this to think of," she continued. "Why is it that Elias Derby is willing to let you experiment this way? He's giving Prince a free hand, too. Now, if your voyage is a success, it will prove him wrong. Gibaut will be proud, and there will be others of the younger men I used to see at Briggs' yard ready to laugh. What's behind this sudden willingness to experiment?"

Nat waved his hand impatiently. "I think I understand it. Captain Prince is often telling me I don't understand the spirals of Salem religion, the diplomatic

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talk, the intrigue that goes on here and there from the wharves up into the town. The truth is, I haven't time for it. But I think I understand why Mr. Derby let Prince have his way with the *Astrea*. In their counting-houses, all good citizens come down to a shortest line between two points."

Elizabeth nodded. "They do. But it isn't obvious always."

"In this case," replied Nat, "I think Mr. Derby wants the *Astrea* to fail. He has made the trip extend to Manila, for one thing, and that's a two-year voyage. He didn't believe in Gibaut's chronometers any more than he believes in my navigation. Therefore, he is glad to encourage a calculated and strictly navigated sailing."

"He thinks you will pile up on Sunda—go on the rocks?"

"Very likely," returned Nat, "and all the men with a new idea would be referred to the voyage of the *Astrea* for years to come. According to the way Mr. Derby has probably considered it, this voyage will be profitable. Distant ports, freak rigs, and mathematical navigation—all eliminated from his concern forever after. No more argument. Don't you really think so?"

Elizabeth was suprised at Nat's ready explanation of Elias Derby. Explanations of the sort were rife in Salem, were often on the lips of the men she saw. But this was laughably clear, whether or not it was true.

She smiled, and shook her head. "If that much is true, what you say is only half of it, Nat. Derby is old and shrewd—he might be ready to play both sides of the game, and win whichever way it went. I'd

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grant you that he might hope for your failure, but he would also be prepared to discount its success at the bank."

"No," was Nat's answer, "he doesn't want the money from one voyage so badly as he wants to keep his pride, to keep to his circumlocutions, and go to the meeting house on Sunday to dream through the sermon with the old familiar schemes in his head. However, I don't care—whichever way it may be—"

Nat involuntarily became aware that his indifference was a fact no longer. He did care. He had but to look at Elizabeth's white fingers to fancy their touch, and know that he was not indifferent to the material outcome of his figuring. It would mean that he could take her hands in his, and tell her what she stirred in him, to have this success.

He frowned, and glanced down at his feet, and noticed how crude his boots seemed, stained with mud and unpolished, on the mirror gloss of the waxed floor. To seem not to care how you came out, materially, just so long as the figures were rightly set down—might not this be as crude as these boots of his on this polished floor?

"I'm not unhappy—" Nat realized he was speaking out loud. "I like to work at the ship's accounts," he continued unevenly, "or check the lading—"

Elizabeth was adroit in recalling Nat from his tangent, back into conversation that made her seem more at ease. Without feeling a particular fear, she wished almost instinctively to deflect Nat from his inward concentration. Her interruption was gentle, and almost unnoticeable, save that soon she was talking, and Nat listening.

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"You must be careful of this," Nat heard Elizabeth say. "If Captain Prince should realize that your freedom to make the voyage by your system of navigation is simply provided by old Derby to insure failure, Prince may see to it that the discredit is complete. It may affect you."

"I see," murmured Nat, not wholly sure that he did, and still quite enwrapped in the uncomfortable consideration of his happiness.

"It is true that Prince has affected a grand manner at the Tavern," continued Elizabeth, "and that his waistcoats come from London. Be sure that he is thinking of a house on Essex Street, and that, once he guessed the purpose of the voyage to be failure and not profit, I believe he would surely choose your plan as the most acceptable excuse, and see to it that something happened to the ship, with the blame on you—especially since he believes you so young and blind to all but your work. It would be easy for you to be made another Gibaut."

"But, Elizabeth," began Nat, almost querulously, "Gibaut is a born teacher, and that's what makes him so hard for Derby to stomach. Gibaut wants to teach Derby about chronometers and French sextants, whether Derby will or not. He was forever teaching me—not that I minded. I don't care about that—I simply want to find out, to make a workable formula. If it results in a ship sailing her course in half the time—well, I shan't need to teach anybody that it's a good thing."

"But you will think of what I said?" asked Elizabeth, with sudden earnestness in her voice that surprised Nat, and shocked him.

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After a moment of silence Nat relaxed, and crossed his feet. He tried to be comfortable in the chair, and not to think of his mud-rimmed boots.

"If I had time to wonder about Prince's motives, and Derby's," he remarked, striving to keep his voice even and casual, "I should have time also to pray endlessly to God about the sins of others. Circling, circling, twisting around—I can't. I become tired, and I can't think."

The mark of Elizabeth's concern that her rising voice and its solicitude carried had upset Nat, and made him impatient anew with himself. It seemed to heighten the desirability—no, the necessity—of Elizabeth to him, to have heard that inflection in her voice.

He spread out his hands abruptly. "Elizabeth," he began, "it is the pure science of figures that I must eventually work with if I am to be happy. My name must be paired with Bernouille, and with Gravesande, and Herschel. It is their company that will make me happy—to correspond with them, to be sought by them, and to work with them. Numbers are the key to all science, and there is so much unknown! Look, numbers are common currency—any one can share an idea in terms of them—and share exactly the same thing. Isn't that wonderful?" Nat's forehead was flushed, and he leaned forward, talking excitedly. "I want to be remembered as Descartes is—success will give me the greatest company in the world; beside it the favor of Derby and the patronage of Prince are wet straw in a horse stall. You must understand how marvelous, how beautiful, it is—to see, actually to read in the memoirs of great men, what before was unknown, despaired of. It makes your heart beat, I tell you, it

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makes you feel like crying out—and yet when you are calm, and cool again, there is no disappointment—only the lure of going further—or going back, perhaps, with the new light to solve what was given up before.”

Elizabeth had kindled to the rising and falling flame of Nat's eyes, as he spoke with almost deliberate calm of these things that were in his head. He had forgotten the presence of his boots on the polished floor; they were drawn up under him as he sat. From the habit of certainty and scrutiny practiced for so long in thinking of mathematics, Nat's voice carried in its tone something true and unswerving in aim. His high voice lost its shrillness; it was gentle, persuasive, and deeply moving to Elizabeth for its lack of mastery, its relaxed appeal. Nat seemed to change; the strands of his uncombed hair receded from Elizabeth's attention wholly, and she was held by the intensity, the warmth, of his eyes. It was as though, without talking of themselves in words, Nat and Elizabeth had for the first time actually communicated with each other. They felt mysteriously close.

Nat shook his head imperceptibly. He glanced up. “Two years,” he said, “Henry Prince said two years or more before we return.” Nat paused a moment. “I used to call it,” he went on, “my peaceful mathematics.” He smiled and repeated the phrase. “Peaceful mathematics. Now—whenever I look long at the opened pages of a book, I see you—smiling, as though you knew something you had not told me. I look up from the book and I stare straight ahead at the plaster of the wall in front of my work table.”

He could not look now at Elizabeth's face. But he knew she had not moved. He saw her hands rest-

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ing on the heavily carved arms of the chair. Her wrist was laid against the turn of its wooden arm.

It was a daring, perhaps, like the courage of water when it runs down hill or the boldness and disregard with which an unsuspended object falls to the earth, that filled Nat, and made him rise from his chair. He walked to the tall window whose curtains had been parted. He looked out into the trellised garden walk obscured by snow.

If it was not the daring in him of falling water, it was the courage of the earth in an epoch of ill-adjustment and forming.

He turned from the window, and walked directly to the carved chair. His hands fell before him, and rested on Elizabeth's shoulders. His fingers were shocked, the bones of her shoulders were so slight. As she half-straightened her body up, in an uncertain movement, Nat's hands rose and came against her cheeks. There was a momentary fragrance, like the sweet grass, the fields in summer, a blinding sense that her lips were curved in a smile as he met them . . .

After Nat had kissed her, it was not clear to him what had happened. She had risen, he knew. But had he fallen sobbing at her feet, and cried there for lengthening minutes, as though suddenly there had been something torn loose in him that had paralyzed his mind and taken all control from his body, or had he staggered back, blindly—how had he come out of the house? He could not remember. It was like Dark Day in the Danvers meadows.

He knew this much—whatever had happened, Elizabeth had been kind to him. He remembered the tone of her voice, the softness of her hands as she put them

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on his forehead. He remembered her soft voice, her clear voice.

He had stumbled back to the Hodges' house somehow. In his attic room, alone, he remembered what he had started out to Elizabeth's house for, what he had in mind to tell her. About the three boxes of shoes he had traded to neat profit, and that he was now signed on the *Astrea's* lists as second mate as well as supercargo. A wave of regret passed over him that he had not told her. But no, he couldn't go back now. He couldn't go back again until the *Astrea* returned.

VI

Nat held to his resolution not to see Elizabeth again until the *Astrea* should have returned to Salem from her voyage to Manila. This voyage, with the accumulated profits the hopes of Henry Prince held were justified on the small sum Nat planned to venture, would give him the right to approach Captain Boardman. Meeting with Elizabeth alone seemed impossible; she could not venture outdoors yet. After what had happened, entering the family circle was too formidable. With alien reasons such as these, Nat fortified his heroic adolescent instinct. The pain of this self-inflicted hurt gave him the only comfort love allows youth.

Of sheer pain under the restriction of not seeing Elizabeth there was a gnawing reality. Nat knew too well the danger of consumption. The Manila voyage would require at least two years, despite the conviction of Henry Prince that he could crowd canvas on the *Astrea's* spars and accomplish the voyage in but little

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more than the time it took the *Henry* to double her track to the Isle of Bourbon. Elizabeth might not be alive.

The few days before sailing passed swiftly. At his second mate's station, aft, Nat was receiving the familiar orders for departure. When he looked up from the arrangement of straining hawsers across the deck, a gap of water showed an irretraceable margin between the *Astrea* and the barnacled piles of the Derby wharf. Northeast weather was in the air with the force of a half-gale; but Henry Prince would not lose a day from his schedule, and under storm cloth the *Astrea* slowly beat her way out from the quayside. . . .

Due to the high wind, there was too much confusion on her decks for Nat to hear the tearful wail of his old father. Habakkuk had renewed his old bones by prolonged libations of Medford and Antigua. With this in his belly he had braved the sting of the raw wind. Habakkuk had lived too long, he felt; he had barely seen his son except for an occasional meeting at the Tavern. With high hope for his son's future, Habakkuk did not wish to remind Salem overly of Nat's connection with him; it was, therefore, fortunate that the filial bonds, so currently in general esteem, did not lead him, in the words of the Bible, to expect honor from his son. And so the old man was left to return to his cabinet of curios and to deepen the sorrow of his mood by fingering them.

But this was not in Nat's mind. If he felt anything beyond the immediate wrench of departure, it was a prayerful trust that the optimism of Henry Prince was real, and that it would not be disproved by the voyage. He must have money.

The Birth of an Idea

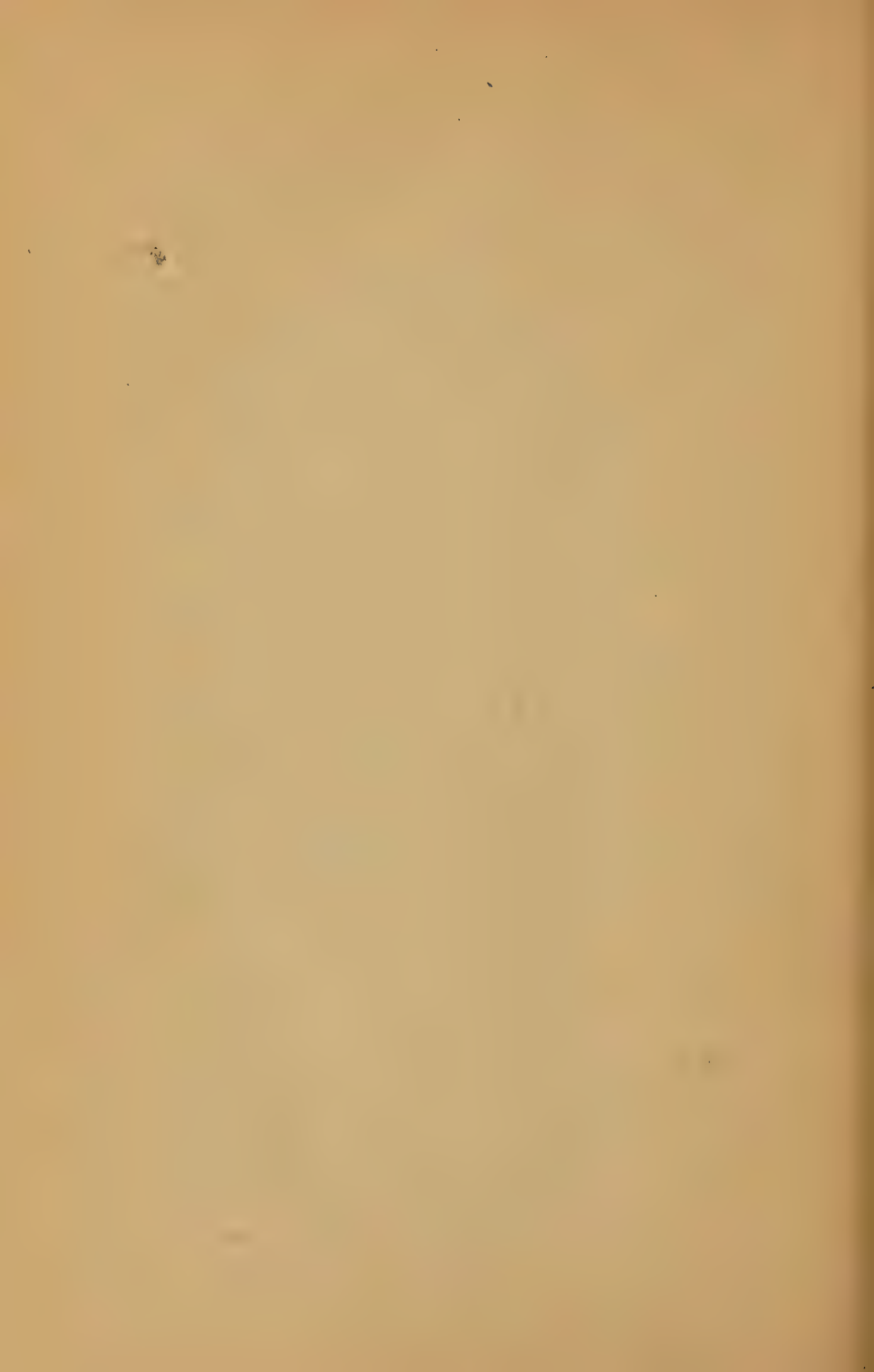
Meanwhile the wharf had widened away from the leaning *Astrea*. She had slipped sidewise and was now beginning to gain way ahead. All hands seemed waiting in expectancy, their thoughts withdrawn from their immediate duty, to center on the rigid figure of their commander. The voyage had begun.

In the first lull of inactivity, Nat's hand returned to his coat pocket, where he had carefully folded away the encouraging letter he had received from Edward Blunt, the Newburyport publisher. Blunt had asked permission to embody Nat's preliminary corrections in the next edition of the "Navigator."

The quiet of the deck and the yard-arm was roughly cut by a sudden gust that struck the *Astrea*. As she had been edging toward the open sea, the benefit of her lee had decreased, and she took the full force of the gale across her bow.

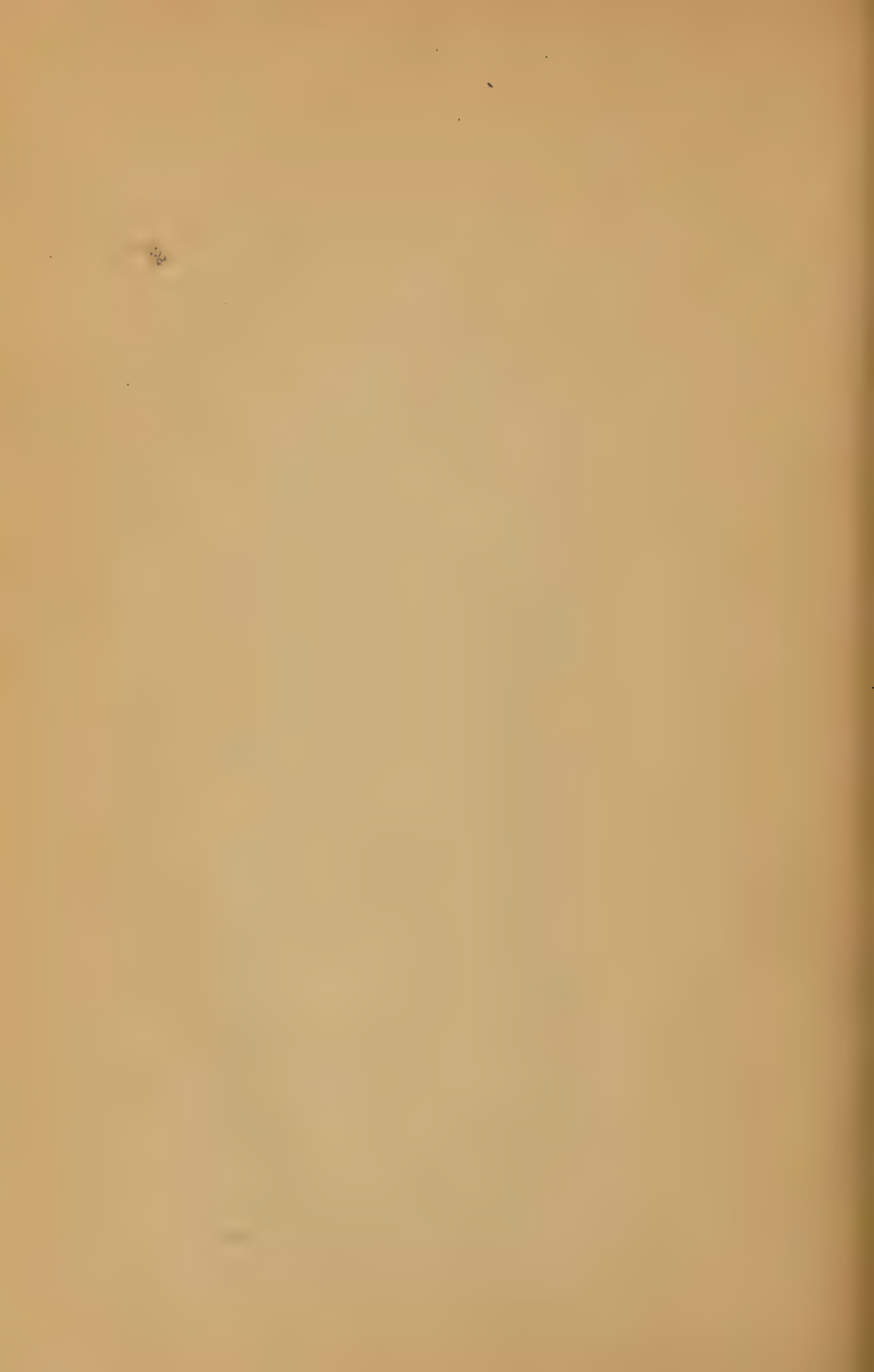
There followed several minutes of expert maneuvering. Henry Prince at last decided to drop anchor for the night under the lee of Baker's Island, and to wait for daylight before trying to work clear of the treacherous ledges and rocks that edged their path seaward.

With daylight on the 27th of March, 1796, the *Astrea* wore clear of the harbor, and was on her ocean track.



VI

THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY



Chapter Fifteen

I

STARLIGHT fell on the streets of old Salem, on the red-bricked walks; beneath the unquiet elms, moving shadows . . . Far at sea on a March Atlantic a small vessel dipped and plunged her way into the dark cold waves rolling in out of nowhere. There was the quick rush of a parted crest falling back into a wake, the groan of the spars as the wind-filled canvas urged the small hull on through the dark waters. Overhead, the three slight masts swaying in an arc across the whole star-set heaven.

In this vessel were twelve men. Prince in command—Bullock, once a non-conformist minister, mate—Bowditch, second mate and supercargo—the rest—one black man from Guinea, the cook, five Americans and three Portuguese sailors. Two sailors on the deserted deck with the wheel between them. Bowditch as second mate, stood forward of the quarterdeck, in the waist of the ship, gazing upward at the stars. Now and again he walked aft to where the two men stood by the helm, and glanced at the compass, shining under the whale oil binnacle lamps.

A few nights before all twelve men were sleeping in quiet old Salem, the outside of their houses covered with starlight and blue shadows, the smell of spring coming out of the damp earth in the night air. Why should men leave the security of their homes, exchange the softness of featherbeds for hammock canvas?

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A few nights ago there had been more than one lover's farewell said beneath a shadowed portico, against the whiteness of a Georgian doorway suavely pilastered. The wind over old Salem yet carried in its rumor through the elms the memory of winter, the threat of what awaited a ship on an open sea.

The sweetness of partings exchanged for the bravado of voyage! The bravado of twelve men in a small vessel, bound around Africa to the eastern seas, to far Manila!

II

Both Bullock as mate of the *Astrea* and Nathaniel felt this pinch of loneliness in the start of their long voyage. All on board felt it—silently.

Now Bowditch, after solitary hours with his thoughts, stood by the binnacle in the gray light of dawn. He observed Bullock ascending the companion stair from the cabin with the eyes of a man returning from another world. The shrewdness was gone from Nat's eyes, and his face was the face of a poet as he turned to greet his superior.

The wind was still blowing, and over the gray heaving water swirled a light fog.

This Bullock was a man for you!

At once you could see how the heartiness of the man would burst the bounds of a parish life ashore. From the broad face of the man, his solid jaws, long upper lip and thick brows, it was plain there could be no enduring delight in mouthing a creed to his congregation in New England. This man was a man for battlefields, to lead other men—turned to the sea.

Prince had signed him on as mate because Prince

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preferred to drink his Cacavilla and his Medford without disciplinary routine interfering. Bullock had a name for handling crews. And with Bowditch inept in commanding men, it was wise to have a man with the voice of a behemoth, with an iron will, and rugged ways. Thus Prince might enjoy the relaxation and contemplative habits appropriate to a captain and this Bullock handle the crew.

Into Bowditch's eyes as he returned to earth and to recognition of his fellow officer came a glint of perception, almost of animosity against this Bullock. The man could not say, "Good morning," without the resonant unction of his voice being carried to the masthead.

Nat nodded briefly by answer, and Bullock launched forth.

"Now, my dear sir," Bullock began, "we are far indeed from the embraces of friends."

"Indeed," returned Nat, scantily polite.

Bullock rolled his eyes to heaven. "The arms of the omnipotent Emanuel surround you. The liquid horizon attracts your eye and gives you the most striking emblem of the Immense Supreme!"

Unstirred except to remove from his mind the last trace of his mood, Nat glanced aloft, as if to go below now his watch was over, with a last glance at the weather.

Bullock was not to be put aside lightly. "Come, my fellow," he went on, now addressing the man at the wheel, "is it not a glorious sight to behold this ocean?"

The tanned Portuguese wiped the mist of dawn from his face with an awkward, uncertain gesture of his hand.

As Bullock's continued gaze seemed to demand an

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answer, he replied, somewhat bewildered, "Esta bien, señor."

"See," thundered Bullock, "this simple heart reflects the glory of the Lord, even though he speak not our language. When you tread the hallowed courts, a light of understanding shines upon your soul. You are a godly man, Mr. Bowditch?"

"Perhaps," returned Nat, puzzled by the intensity of Bullock's flushed face.

"Perhaps?" Bullock shouted. "Perhaps? Then this voyage shall be a turning mark in your life. Before we shall again see Salem I will have established the righteousness of the Lord in you. Here, where the watery worlds proclaim the grandeur of your Lord, will I show you. And ever after you will be safe in His hand, happy in His breast, as you plow the briny deep. You will return, and speak praise of Him who through calms and tempests brings His people safely to their desired haven!"

Nat had heard enough. His eyes threw a hard fierce look into the beaming expansive face of Bullock. In his heart now there were qualms for the success of this long voyage.

But Bullock's countenance had lifted to the skies. Possibly he was in prayer.

"The course is east a quarter north, Mr. Bullock," Nat muttered as he withdrew from the quarterdeck.

III

Nat found Prince in the after cabin, up for an early morning cup of tea. After informing him of the *Astrea's* progress during the night, Nat asked Prince

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why he had permitted a man of Bullock's eloquence to be signed as mate.

Prince waved his hand. "We are on a long voyage, Nat. Religion has persuasion in it. It may be good to have Mr. Bullock with us. It can put heart into the men when we round the Cape should there be head winds."

Nat rubbed his nose dubiously, and both men took their steaming cups of tea from the black cook and drank gratefully.

Prince began to dress, and Nat fell into a comfortable doze on the bunk opposite Prince's.

His sleep was sharply interrupted by the booming voice of Bullock down the companion hatch.

"Captain Prince!" Bullock shouted. "Captain!"

Immediately both men responded, thinking some rigging had carried away or a man dropped overboard.

"You must see the morning, Captain," cried Bullock. "Look, how serene!"

"Anything adrift?" shouted Prince.

Bullock reassured him, holding the lapels of his coat, that all was well aboard, and that it was only the glory of the sunrise that had prompted the call to deck.

"See, sir!" Bullock went on. "The filthy fog has retired to give us leave to see the sun—see—his beams gladden every wave. He seems to tinge the sea with golden hue, and pour his rays through all the sky. What earthly monarch ever rose so bright?"

Prince stroked his beard uneasily, and twisted his mustachios.

Bullock went on. Several of the crew had gathered at the waist of the ship to listen. The raised voice of the mate had brought them from the fo'c'sle.

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"Yet Sol," chanted Bullock, now including the small group of the crew in his audience with a wave of his arm, "is but a faint resemblance of Israel's King—that King whose wide domain shall reach to yonder eastern clime. Soon may He send His heralds to sound His precious name!"

By now a heavenly ecstasy possessed Bullock. The men listened, rapt, amazed, awed.

"Soon"—Bullock's voice hung dramatically over the moment of silence—"soon may we hear that East unites with West, and all the globe proclaims the Savior's love! Who can tell, Captain? You see the sun arise and strike his rays around. Perhaps the Savior"—Bullock's voice fell to a whisper—"perhaps the Savior, too, may now arise with healing in His beams, and save all heathen races."

At this point Bullock cocked a round eye on Nathaniel, as though it were to him instead of to the plural races that the Savior might devote His personal attention.

"The man must be mad," Nat whispered to Prince.

Prince turned as though nothing had happened and faced the crew.

"Aloft, ye lazy bastards!" he suddenly shouted. "Trim those sails!" He turned to Bullock.

"Mister Mate, have your helmsman inform you of any changes in wind. While you were speaking, the wind shifted a point. Direct the men as they are aloft."

Prince was about to quit the deck when he caught a gleam of amusement in the helmsman's eye.

"There will be services on Sunday, Mr. Bullock. The men will hear you then."

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Crestfallen, but not angry, the humbled but persistent Bullock took up the business of trimming sail. He beamed on Prince's departing back. Already he was thinking of Sunday, of this divine opportunity given him to save men's souls.

IV

Bullock seemed to follow Nathaniel through his daily routine, offering long declamations on any moral that came within reach. He had a facility for argument.

He had already said "East is West" and a few other notably theological contributions to the science of navigation, when our Nathaniel's patience against his superior wore through.

Nat had been reading the log in the morning. He took exception to a nautical simile of Bullock's.

"These are simple things," spoke out Nat, "my duties in navigating the *Astrea*. They do not concern your work, and they have little in common with sermons."

Bullock opened his mouth wide, and stared at Nat reproachfully. "You have been taking the log. But see, you look at the book, adjust the course. So far advanced, but, ah! how much leeway. So is our life. How swift we move, but seldom keep our course. Amazing! So much wasted time is gone. I look back—the wake is closed, my minutes, days, and years are mingled with the flood. O thou Heavenly Pilot!"

And later over tea Bullock again was tempted into discourse. "See—our floating habitation affords us pleasant food. Heaven bless the poor on land, and kindly feed the *souls* that famish on the seas!"

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Here again Nathaniel was made the object of divine solicitude.

When Nathaniel later in the day was bent over a section of a great circle sailing, Bullock came up and thumped his back.

"So let us take the precious Book of God, that Chart Divine—our faith a compass, our hearts a scale, and with these find the way to perfect bliss. Come, thou celestial winds, fill my sails, and I shall speed my way to yonder happy shore, and see my God, my Father, and my friend."

Nat turned quickly. "Indeed, sir, the chances would be good."

Bullock was a bit taken aback at this literal interpretation.

"I am confident that the Lord provides for seamen and guides them with His hand, sir. You question the divine promptings that have guided man across the seas? And you would substitute your mathematics for faith everlasting?"

"Sir," replied Bowditch, "the faith, the confidence, of which you speak is likened often by you to a cup of wine?"

"A sacred wine," answered Bullock.

"Ashore many glasses may be taken without trouble. But at sea the heel of a vessel may tilt the wine and disappoint the sailor's lips."

Later in the morning when Nat was sharing cherry wine, cheese and biscuits with Prince in the after-cabin, he recalled this reply with laughter for Prince's benefit.

"You had him stirred up, Nat, with your silence," said Prince, "and now you have stung him with that

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reply. Won't you be careful? It is best to leave such men alone."

Nat selected several nuts from the dish, and bent over to crack them under his heel.

"He has been stirring up the crew, sir. Two men have asked me questions in theology this very day," said Nat.

Prince shook his head and followed a piece of cheese and biscuit with a sip of the cherry wine.

"Ah, well, it is unwise to be too deeply concerned about such matters," Prince answered. "So long as it does not interfere with the voyage, I shall do nothing."

They fell to picking nuts together. The dry taste of the nuts after the wine and cheese was excellent. Each fell into his own mood of thought, and the *Astrea* bore on under the favoring breeze.

Chapter Sixteen

I

LISBON had been marked out on the chart as the first port of call.

The ugly weather of the first day pursued the *Astrea*, alternately with moderate wind, for the early part of this run. During a blow the crew had all they could do to handle the vessel. Part of the *Astrea's* difficult handling in a seaway came from her size and part from the speed Prince persisted in maintaining under the wide spread of storm canvas. A trick at her helm was a giant's labor.

However, toward the middle part of their passage, the North Atlantic gales dropped astern, and they fell in with mild southerly weather. On the morning of April 24th they sighted Lisbon, and the vine-covered hills behind it. With most of the Portuguese maritime wealth concentrated about the mouth of the Tagus, this rich spread of villas that the sunlight marked white and pink and yellow on the hillside was explained.

The *Astrea* made but a short stay in Lisbon, to take on a small quantity of wine. On the sixth of May, the *Astrea*, still light-burdened, dropped down the Tagus, and directed her course to Madeira, where report had it the wine prices were lower.

On the morning of May 15th, the high foreground of Madeira was made out rising from the sea.

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All day the *Astrea* worked down the shore of the island under full sail, until evening, when the pilot from the harbor of Funchal climbed aboard.

Wine was to be had in plenty, and at a favorable price. Stowing away huge pipes of it kept the crew busy for several days.

Soon, the *Astrea* again made sail, and was reaching out of Funchal to take advantage of the Antarctic drift current south of the Cape of Good Hope.

It was on this run on the southing that Nat perfected a tentative method for lunar observation. Having clear weather and a good moon, by the time they had dropped toward the latitude of the Cape he was able to talk about the idea in simple language to the crew, all of whom had been made curious by Nat's continual observations. It seemed an unearthly business to be so concerned with the moon, and, during her dark periods, with the stars.

He talked to the men patiently, and to answer their questions he made many diagrams with chalk on the holy-stoned deck. Nat knew his method must prove workable in hands such as these if it were to have value. And how to do it! An initial error in working a lunar observation brought a thirty-six-fold error in the result.

Until late at night he regularly calculated with unslackening fervor, now achieving accuracy at the expense of simplicity, and now the reversed situation—each being equally useless for his purpose.

Henry Prince often intruded into the close-gathered circle about Nat. After they rounded the Cape, Prince would remark, the adverse northeast monsoon must be met. July was the time of this unfavorable steady

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blow. Prince explained to those of the crew who were without the experience of the northward beat through the Indian Ocean that their course would be zigzagged beyond recognition as far as dead-reckoning figures would show, due to the incessant need of tacking and the consequent incalculable side-slip and leeway. The necessity was clear, and the men in the crew were not slow to see the practical importance of the figures Nat pushed at them. If they could master these figures, it would mean certain promotion out of the fore-castle to the quarterdeck on any future voyages.

Nat promised to share each calculation with them when the course should have swung northward against the monsoon toward Java Head, the narrow gateway to the Indies. By the time they had reached the latitude of Isle de France, he assured them, they would be making their own observations and would know their position each day.

Nat was heartened, not only because he had enlisted the interest of the crew in these calculations, but also because Prince's whole attitude toward the voyage had extinguished any question that he might frustrate it to gain Derby's favor. The thought had simply not occurred to Prince that Elias Derby had given him a free hand in the hope he might fail!

II

Bullock's fervor had tempered under the compelling routine of a long voyage. The immensity of the ocean was not only conducive to vocal humility, but distinctly a bar to continued personal importance. After a time, any vocabulary would go flat against such complacency

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of nature, such utter disregard of private will as wind and weather displayed.

Nevertheless, Bullock had Sunday. And on Sunday there was a sermon, eloquent and persuasive. Sometimes the guile of flattery would awaken the sailor sensibilities.

"Certainly, you have an advantage on the seas," this devout man would begin, "unfelt, if not unknown, to those on land; you are more immediately, more sensibly, dependent on Him whom winds and seas obey."

The interest of the crew in Nathaniel's observations affected Bullock too. They were fast becoming calculators, and Bowditch a leader. A tinge of jealousy for the undivided regard of the men touched Bullock's soul.

In his sermons it spurred him to giddy flights of eloquence, truly moving periods of prose.

"In awful majesty," he would whisper, "your God rideth upon the wings of the storm. Now He speaks with terrifying command, and casts the foaming deep to mountain height—anon, His milder voice is heard—the gentle airs softly fill the pendent sheets, and peace smiles o'er the lowly waves."

Much of these sermons was built on this major theme: that wind and weather, and consequently the progress of the *Astrea's* voyage, were in God's hands. By implication at least, if not by direct charge, it was impious to attempt to interfere with this divine control of affairs.

Sooner or later, Bowditch would have to face this man on a false issue—if remarkable success attended the conclusion of the voyage whoever won would take credit for it.

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In his heart Nat slowly began to see, as he listened to Bullock, the issue of his life brought out in miniature against this crew. It was the conflict of wills between these two men—the conflict of authority, superstition, religious dogma, expressed in Bullock's figure, and the slender beautiful truth of figures forever so alluring to Nat.

In the meantime, Nat went on with his work, painfully instructing now even the Guinea cook in the method of lunar observation.

Bullock had resigned attempts for the personal salvation of Nat and Prince.

To Prince this struggle for leadership seemed of no concern—his only to have a few nuts to crack and pick, and then to walk up and down the deck reflecting on the possibilities of the voyage, of great wealth and final ease.

III

To beat all the way up from the Cape to the Strait of Sunda, and thence to Luzon Island and the port of Manila against the monsoon, was a daring feat of navigation. With a course that zigzagged in oblique angles, gradually moving her position northward through the Indian Ocean, the *Astrea* was held to Prince's plan by Nat's carefully made calculations. In other circumstances a layover at the Isle de France, or in the roadstead before the Isle of Bourbon, would have been the more familiar practice. But this long wait for the monsoon to reverse was eliminated by Prince on Nat's persuasion.

The crew labored heavily, watch on watch, forever resetting the canvas and trimming the yards. But each of the men—even including the cook—was able to bear

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the apparently hopeless maze of their slanting progress because at night, by their own figures, they could point to a dot on the chart with Nat, and see that the dot was ahead of yesterday's dot, and in the direction of Java Head.

The highlands of Java were at length sighted exactly on the day they were expected, and in the predicted direction and distance. The long series of observations proved to a hair, when, on September 7th in the murky light of dawn, Java Head loomed through the clouds bearing dead ahead to the East, about twenty miles distant.

There remained the difficult Strait of Sunda, between Java and Sumatra, and the Banca Straits. Hot oppressive weather increased the strain of the work on all hands. Where before the surface was limitless ocean, now they were in the grip of swift currents that poured toward shoals on every hand. On the 9th, the anchor was put over three times just in time to avert the vessel's loss. It was not until the 17th that the *Astrea* was at last clear of the Strait and driving past Bornean coast for the island of Luzon and Manila Bay.

By beating to the windward into the China Sea, Prince obtained a more favorable angle of wind, thus enabling him to lay the course to Manila. With all the crew eager to make the landfall that would prove their calculations exactly, despite the swing up into the China Sea, the *Astrea* filled away on her eastward course.

On Sunday, the 2nd of October, Luzon was sighted eighteen miles to the east. Under the press of favorable wind, and certain that they could not be far from Manila Bay, the *Astrea* closed in rapidly. . . .

To the amazement of the other vessels in the harbor,

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by evening they were riding placidly at anchor. The last thing expected was the arrival of an American in the adverse monsoon season. But the *Astrea* was there, and the crew already gone aloft to furl the canvas. The first direct Salem-Manila run had been completed in a little more than six months.

In strange waters, every day they had known where they were going. They had sailed no extra miles in all the tacking. In terms of this, the time of the voyage was not unusual.

If the *Astrea* could be loaded by late November, they might almost hope to ride favorable winds southward, and make the long run to the Cape of Good Hope in a straight line.

IV

All hands worked feverishly at the task, but it was not until December 12th that the wines had been sold and Nat drew a line under the totals of the return cargo. They had on board:

750,000 pounds of sugar
63,695 pounds of pepper
29,767 pounds of indigo

It was a heavy cargo for the *Astrea*; the other shipmasters counseled Prince in vain to lighten it. Prince had laughed roughly, and replied that not only would he not relinquish a pound, but that he planned to crowd on sail to reach the Cape in favorable wind . . . The *Astrea* filled away before the breeze and was clear of Manila Bay by the evening of the twelfth.

Once again there was the difficult Strait of Sunda to retrace, then Java Head, and the clear sweep of the

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Indian Ocean before them. Nat prepared the course with extreme care, and Prince ordered sail after sail spread on the deep-laden vessel. Night and day, with a huge bone in her teeth, the *Astrea* ran her southing down . . .

Recalling his success with the boxes of shoes on the first voyage, Nat had purchased several bales of hides in Manila. They were stowed snugly in the hold, and would put a small fortune into his hands when he came to sell them in Salem or Beverly.

V

But if Elizabeth were dead—that chance must be faced—all his effort and planning would turn to dust in his mouth. If she were gone, and his hope for a house, with her as his wife, ended, there remained only the one unchangeable thing in his life—his peaceful mathematics. That, it seemed beyond the power of events to alter. Yet without Elizabeth, most curiously, achievement in that direction seemed barren, as fruitless as the gold he would have for the hides. He would be left with a dead mathematics, too.

This was so strange and miraculous a thing—for Elizabeth was not a figure. She was not a number in his mathematics. She was a living creature; her interest made him happy, and she could give him pain by her indifference. For his love of the straight line and the logic of figures, he must look for the roots of these in a living creature, whom he loved, but to whom these things had no special meaning. To keep the glamorous shimmer of excitement and wonder in his work, he must live with Elizabeth. To imagine the small daily character of their living together, to think of its simplest

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acts, renewed him when he was tired and gave him keenness of edge.

As the *Astrea* rolled southward through the low swells of fair weather and a following wind, Nat set himself a problem in life that corresponded to mathematics. Of what use is the unknown quantity? Surely, without a need of it, there could be little use in combining the certain quantities. And also, by itself, the unknown meant nothing except a hellish devilment and torture.

This involved thinking was the path of his recurrent longing to live with Elizabeth and penetrate her secret. Elizabeth was the lovely embodiment of the unknown.

At other times, on deck at night, there was the dim canvas overhead, the rhythmmed rush of parted water in his ears, and in his heart only the deep ache that was without name.

VI

The physical laws that permitted the *Astrea* to sail operated inevitably, and without consulting Henry Prince's spirited gestures of command. The rise of the deep-laden ship over the swells was regular; and so was the force that gathered and drove in her outspread canvas aloft. She was being driven ahead so hard by the extra sails that, as the wind increased, each rise sent a shivering stroke of vibration down her hard-pressed masts.

This gradual working at the timbers increased in play, until, on the 18th of February, a major leak was reported to the quarterdeck. To Bullock, this misfortune was a divine warning to the haughty.

Prince did not concern himself with the theology of the matter, but lightened sail immediately and stationed

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two men at the pumps. Day and night the pumps were worked without pause. Nor did they cease pouring a steady bubbling stream overside as they passed the Cape, worked north into the Atlantic.

The clank of the pumps echoed out into the nights of fair sailing, and was hardly drowned by a rising wind and the overwash of spray down the decks.

Through this long tedium of passage, Nat still shared each observation with the crew. At night, when sleep seemed the best answer to hands burned thick with salt-cracked callous, Nat sought to make the men take heart as he showed them the day's run projected on the chart. The food was almost entirely hard biscuits and salt pork, and the weariness of unchanged horizons was an oppressive film before each eye as the crew gazed at what was put before them to eat. But maybe they could fight their way up out of this dry-throated slavery to the relative ease of the after cabin by these now familiar figures. In handling clewlines and buntlines, working out on the yard-arm, or at the standing rigging—if their work was exact and seagoing, the dot on the long path to Salem would seem that much farther advanced.

With fingers enlarged and thick from wet ropes, and eyes rimmed red with the sting of salt that had dried on their faces, this crew of rough-voiced bearded giants handled the quadrant with precious care and steady hand.

As they passed into the northern Atlantic, they entered the spring season. The dawns were cool and early, and the air filled with life there was no plant to receive, but which distilled a restless and intoxicating measure for the men on the *Astrea*.

The food that had made the crew wrinkle their faces

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involuntarily at its sight was bolted or half left. On the decks there was even horseplay—a bucket of water doused over the head of one too lusty in his chant of the delights to be run through shortly in Salem. On the yard-arms a joke would pass from man to man as they stood in the foot-ropes taking in a sail. And forward, at the pumps, the clank of the iron handles was more timed, more vigorous. Chanteys rose from the bending and straightening chests.

Gradually the observations were quite neglected. Nat stood alone in the calm air in the waist of the ship while he took his sight. There was only seldom an impatient cry for the result. Sometimes when Nat gave the position there was a distinct sneer here and there, or a smothered laugh.

The increasing heartiness of the crew toward the world left them impatient with calculations. They were irritated by the work at the pumps, impatient for land. Bullock found that the easiest way to get the sails trimmed smartly was to drop a joke about his gaunt brother officer—always phrased with a blunt nicety that the pastoral vocabulary made easy and which pleased the men.

As the voyage neared completion, and its phenomenal speed became apparent, and the amazing record that they might make for the Manila run became more real, Bowditch shrank in importance.

“Tail on to that sheet, my man!” Bullock would cry. Perhaps a decimal of a knot’s gained speed would result.

That was the sailor of it! Men who could handle rigging—who could send a leaking ship plowing ever faster on her way. Maybe these heroic efforts might

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gain a day or two—Bowditch's work had gained them weeks and months.

Prince took no sides openly. It was not necessary—might not be politic. Further, in any difference, officially at least, he must side with the mate rather than his junior.

Bullock's sermons of a Sunday grew shorter. And as land was within a few days' run, Nat's observations grew longer, more exact in detail.

Nat saw that Bullock was preparing to take credit for the quickness of the voyage, and expected the testimony of the crew to validate the belief that it was his strong handling of ship and crew that had made the run possible.

His confiding of these suspicions to Prince brought the captain of the *Astrea* to the quarterdeck more frequently. Prince had no mind to chance Bullock's gaining the credit for the result of his daring seamanship and Nat's fine figuring.

Whenever Nat heard the crew extolling seamanship, praising Bullock's good sense in ignoring the difficulties of exact navigation, he remained silent. Occasionally he was tempted to answer stupid self-confidence hotly. But his thin body and bony arms made his bitter reproof to the men seem ludicrous, even to himself.

There were other affairs that might have been expected to excite concern or interest. The several ships to which they spoke all reported the brewing troubles of America, England, and France. But what trouble was there possible in such a cool, sunlit air, with the foam of the *Astrea's* wake so bright behind them? They were men of the sea; the world ashore seemed to have lost its importance in their lives.

Then at length, on the evening of the 21st of May,

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Nat passed the word forward that a landfall might be expected any time the following day.

Ironically, without thinking of the fallacies assumed to lie in Nat's figuring, the men swarmed the masts like tropical apes, till Henry Prince ordered that a doubled lookout was sufficient. Prince himself was restive for a sight of green. The pear trees would be in bloom, and the lilacs. He sighed. The night passed slowly.

Shortly after dawn, the cry of "Land ho!" came down from the fore-royal top. The men stormed the deck with sleepy eagerness, and crowded against the rail. As the *Astrea* drew in closer, and the morning mist lifted, Cape Ann stood out, bearing to the northwest. They had made a true course, and were almost directly on their path. As the sun rose higher, the shoreward breeze increased. By evening they would be standing in past Marblehead, in sight of Salem.

The men beat one another across the back in the first excess of joy. Sighting land as predicted, however, did not seem to connect in their minds with navigation.

Nat watched the men quietly. He foresaw that an hour after they had entered the bar of the Sun Tavern, they would be singing and swearing by tarry oaths to one another that they had never once calculated a position, that their arrival was the result of brawn, and heroic work at the pumps. To those whom they might meet, this story would make them greater men than if they should confess to the hours of clumsy work at slates, like school boys learning to cipher.

Nat foresaw that his part in the Manila voyage, so far as the public estimation might go, would evaporate like alcohol, and leave only the small sum of money he had made as the one present and tangible result.

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VII

A brisk westerly wind held firm all day; by six o'clock the *Astrea* was bearing in toward the Salem wharves.

Nat had Henry Prince's spyglass fixed close to his eye, and trained on the Derby pierhead.

The edges of the circular picture through its eyepiece were rough and dark. Objects and people stood out only when in the center of the field, and they appeared to slide in and out of the image with dismaying eccentricity. The *Astrea's* arrival had evidently been reported. Elias Derby undoubtedly was observing her course up the harbor from his counting-house window, conjecturing her freight from her load line.

As the heavy ship slipped in on the breeze that was now beginning to slacken, Nat saw the indistinguishable knot of people gathering and moving restlessly across the pierhead. He steadied the glass against the after braces; his hand was shaking. Returning his eye to the end piece, he peered again, motionless. He could see more clearly, and almost distinguish faces. He twisted the end section for better focus. There—suddenly he had it clear for a moment. He moved his glass slowly back and forth; for the briefest moment, he was able to identify three people. Habakkuk's red beard and body bent forward; Captain Boardman a little to one side of the others, erect, unmoved, as a former commander should be; and, just in front of him, a spot of blue. Nat steadied his eyepiece more firmly against the brace. A blue merino shawl—Elizabeth beyond a doubt! Try as he might, he could not seem to encircle the three again in his glass. Even the housetops along Derby Street were blurred with tears.

Chapter Seventeen

I

AS the *Astrea* warped her laden sides against the barnacled piles of the familiar Derby wharf, the cheers from the crowd gathered on the planks lost their earlier rhythm and became more excited. Now and again a new voice stood out.

Nat was stationed in the waist of the ship, Prince aft on the quarterdeck, and Bullock forward. Aboard the *Astrea* there was confusion almost equal to that on the wharf. Men aloft furling the wind-stiffened canvas, men at the capstan under Bullock warping in the bow, men aft surging on lines. Shouts and confusion rose from the sun-bleached decks to greet cheers from the wharf.

Excitement? Yes. Salem knew what had been done, if she did not know how. Salem knew another world market had been opened to her. This voyage of the *Astrea* in record time had proved anew the cause of Salem's route to the East around Africa instead of Boston's track through Magellan.

Derby—when Nat handed him the cargo invoices and ladings—would understand what had happened better than any of these people here. He would see the great commercial profits.

Now, as the ship's rail drew nearer the dock, a nimble wharfinger made the leap of the intervening

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space. On the deck he ran aft to Prince on the quarter-deck.

He would have caught at Prince's lapels had not the captain of the *Astrea* pushed him abruptly aside.

"You are a hero, sir!" the wharfinger cried.

Prince lost consciousness of this invader from the shore in an instant. The tramp of the men forward around the capstan, warping in the old hull, the clank of the iron pawls as they fell slot by slot, and the dripping hawsers moved his ship against the wharf—these sights and sounds were all that Prince knew. The cheering was a blur of noise. Now and again he caught his name on some uplifted voice.

Nat kept his station in the waist. Coming against the pier, the familiar rigging of the *Astrea* seemed taller, even majestic. With his eyes on Elizabeth he felt a wave of pride. Bullock seemed to be gone from the forward deck, and Prince from the quarterdeck—in his mind the illusion of command, of achievement, was vivid. For him there now lay the familiar outlines of Salem, his ship, made into a victorious image, approaching. The sight of Elizabeth had worked this intoxicating change in Nat.

When the lines were made fast and Nat vaulted up over the rail to the wharf, Elizabeth quickly found herself in the grip of Nat's intense embrace.

Laughing at themselves, they separated, and Captain Boardman shook Nat's hand while Elizabeth held the other.

"A remarkable voyage, my boy," Captain Boardman was saying. "I understand the honor is chiefly yours—this new way of navigating my daughter has mentioned so often since you sailed."

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Without stopping for Prince or for his chest, Nat started up toward the town, hardly knowing where he was going.

A queue of people gradually formed into a line, leaving the wharf. Those of the crew less flustered than Nat, with sea bags over their shoulders and their caps at a slant, were walking arm in arm with their mothers, sisters, sweethearts, younger brothers, fathers, and friends who had elected the counting-house instead of the deck.

Nat was as happy as any in that procession. The desertion of the men from their work in navigation, the irritating pride of Bullock, his talk of divine guidance—these vanished, and as he entered Water Street a new era seemed opening for him, when Salem was his.

In this way had the sight and touch of Elizabeth again been the fire of his aspiration.

II

While Nat had been at sea, Ben Crowninshield had called more than once at the Boardman house. Such a slim and beautiful prize as Elizabeth could not fail to excite Ben's interest.

Still the same man of the world that he had been when years ago he had complained in the Sun Tavern that the Salem band was not the equal of Boston's, Ben yet had a streak of the lion in him. A full six feet, squarely built in a way that gave his London clothes always an accent of smartness, Ben had achieved a manner that was almost an exact expression of Salem aristocracy. His effect of careless intolerance made smaller men follow him, made women fall in love with him.

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Ben was arrogant, yes, and quite flawless and intuitively perfect for his own needs.

Once Ben had kissed Elizabeth. She could never forget her vivid fear that there might be no way to convince him quickly that she could not bear it a second time. His embrace had not slackened, and he had bent a second time. In his first kiss, she had felt a revulsion at the sense of mastery and possession and calmness with which he assumed it. She had struggled free before the second, burning with anger.

Why? she had wondered later. She had fancied herself now and again as the mistress of the Crowninshield house. The ample space of its rooms was made for her. And yet when Ben had kissed her, there was the breath gone out of it all—an uncontrollable revulsion. Was it that Ben had seemed to know too suavely what he wanted from her? It was hard to believe it was that, for she had admired his assured worldly air.

Between a Crowninshield and a Bowditch there seemed little choice, and yet it was on the evening that Ben had kissed her, later, after the excitement had passed, that she realized the depth of her love for Nat. She felt toward Nat the affection she might feel toward a child; the flow of warmth toward him was from a remote but central vitality in her, and the pleasure she received from remembering him was shadowed always by this feeling.

There was a sulky interval of absence after his experience with Elizabeth, and then Ben had returned as an occasional visitor to the Boardman house. Now his attention was wholly for Mary.

Without Elizabeth's eyes, nevertheless Mary seemed a counterpart of her sister, but more hard and gay and

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accessible. Elizabeth was an illusive delicately outlined shadow against the body of her sister, and Ben believed he had found the reality in Mary because he could feel its active gay responses.

III

In the evening, the tables filled slowly at the tavern. By the time the tallow dips were lighted, several of the *Astrea's* crew were scattered here and there, each with an attentive group of two or three about him. The story of the voyage was told, the story of nights ashore in Manila. Now and then a new arrival would stroll in, order his pot of Medford, and join one or the other of the groups.

For these new arrivals the story must be told again. Into the wind-tanned faces of the crew had come the flush of alcohol. In each telling the story must perforce take on new vividness, be told with greater embellishment, and grander tones and gestures. There was also some competition between each group. One man thought of the figuring that had occupied Nat throughout the trip. Stories were told about Nat, each ending in a burst of laughter.

Here was a new subject. The audience had grown tired of hearing how Prince piled on canvas and raced his loaded vessel through the seas—after all, drunk or sober, to sailors there was a limit to the number of sails that could be spread on one vessel. Most of the men in the tavern were now gathered around one table, where one narrator after another was holding forth, each striving to outdo his predecessor, each relying on an anecdote about the *Astrea's* supercargo for a laugh. Nat had

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figured the grains of sand in the ocean bottom, he had calculated the age of the beef they ate, he had figured the number of stars in the sky.

In came Bullock. There was a cheer and a waving of pewter mugs.

"Fill up!" cried one.

"Tell us about the leak!" cried another. "How you saved the ship."

Bullock responded with a hearty cry for his rum, and a greeting to the men of the *Astrea's* crew. He tore open his shirt at the neck, placed one foot on the bench and gripped his mug tight as he leaned forward with intense gestures.

Ah, here was a man to fire the hearts of his fellow men with the strength of God himself. From his boundless store of energy Bullock delivered words that thundered to the praise of God and the heroic hardships and strength of all sailors. His befuddled audience would rouse itself to a cheer, and refilled mugs periodically. It was a hard lot to wrest a living from the sea for young captains and puny supercargoes. But there were bonds of iron forged between the men who endured, who would one day rise to the top, and claim command of their own.

The next day all maritime Salem knew of the daring of Prince in crowding sail on his blunt-nosed *Astrea*, they knew of the leak that threatened night and day to gain upon the muscles of the crew. Elizabeth, with her ears open to all talk concerning the sea, and this voyage in particular, heard the story several times.

Puzzled to find the truth of it, she asked Nat.

With a shrug of his shoulders Nat gave his opinion that though there had been steady spells at the pumps,

Navigator,

the leak had never been serious, and that a more humble weapon than celestial omnipotence had been behind the record voyage. To Elizabeth's sympathetic ear, he poured out his story again—how navigation was not a repetition of schoolroom ciphering, but a sea-going practicality.

It was not long before Derby listened to the now completely angered Elizabeth. From her valiant tongue, he had an oration as convincing as if she had actually seen the fleet of tea clippers of 1850 driving homeward from Pagoda Anchorage with a Bowditch navigator at the helm, leading the world in speed and sure arrival.

Elizabeth soon became associated with Nat in the eyes of Salem for her fiery espousals of his cause, and for that reason they were not surprised at the publication of the banns between them early in the year following the return of the *Astrea*.

Nat worked unceasingly at his figures now. Love of Elizabeth, the warmth of her attachment to him, seemed ever to surprise him, and to fire his will anew to reduce the secret of the heavens wholly into tables of figures that a mariner might follow surely.

In March Nat and Elizabeth were married.

Chapter Eighteen

I

IT was the month of May and of lilac in Salem, almost a year from the day the *Astrea* returned from Manila. Elizabeth was sitting in the small garden in the rear of the house on Essex Street that Nat had secured after their marriage.

Nat had gone with Henry Prince to Becket's Beach where Retire Becket was building for Elias Derby the *Mount Vernon*, a sizable ship whose burden would be over three hundred and fifty tons. Elizabeth would have enjoyed going with the two men, and listening to the shipyard talk.

Privately, however, she preferred to Becket the constructions of Enos Briggs; at tea in his house on Harbor Street, she had often listened to Briggs' light-hearted talk about the darling models of his hand. And at Briggs' yards on the shore west of the cotton mills and on Winter Island there was the same feeling in the air—that a ship was a fancy lady. Enos Briggs had made a model of a frigate of eight hundred tons, and fixed up her plan with ornamented cannon ports, and a lavishly carved figurehead. He had not done this by definite commission; he had simply taken the heavy political talk of the many foregatherings, and said, "If you fear foreign hostility to your trade, build this frigate by subscription!"

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But William Gray and Elias Derby had not wished to back up their choleric talk about the X.Y.Z. affair with ten thousand pounds apiece, and the model of the *Essex*—for that was the name Briggs had given her—reposed over the white mantel of his Harbor Street home, revolutionary in her size, yet with an exquisite fanciful decoration and minutely considered detail.

Elizabeth might have gone with her husband and Prince to the Becket Yard. But she had hesitated, and this was a new characteristic, come to her since she had married Nat.

Nat had particularly asked his wife if she wished to come. She had thought for the flash of a moment of Enos Briggs' model of the *Essex*. Inside, she said no to Nat's proposal; but outwardly she put her hand on his arm and smiled as she shook her head. She would go into the garden; the carpet of grass was so green and the afternoon air scented from the lilacs. She preferred that.

Elizabeth had gone to her room after the men had left, and put on a yellow dress of pineapple silk; a fancy dress at its edges, whose simple lines from the frill about her throat fell smoothly to the bell skirt and the ruffled hem. She hummed to herself when she had completed the change; she looked down at her feet, for she liked to see them appear and disappear swiftly under her skirt as she took quick steps.

Now in the garden Elizabeth sat in her favorite chair, a light-spindled mahogany rocker with a high fretted back and rush seat. It held her supple body with nicety. Under the persuasion of its pervading comfort, her mind was lulled into the immediate past. She fell to thinking over her marriage to Nat. In the

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end, perhaps, it had been Nat's strange intensity that had won her love. It was a mysterious thing to her, not at all definable by her except as a protective sympathy that had turned to love.

II

Just two months ago, in March, Nat and Elizabeth had been married. With the profits from his hides, Nat was able to provide for the simple Essex Street house. And Elizabeth took with her boxes of fine Irish linen damask, her favorite articles of pewter and silver, a few tables with slim fluted legs, some chairs and special pieces of furniture she had attached herself to. Captain Boardman would finger his white beard with simulated amazement as Elizabeth would suggest another item. Then he would abruptly smile and wave his broad hand helplessly.

The mulatto servant had come to Essex Street as well. Elizabeth was not strong enough to take the cares of a house wholly on her shoulders. Nat had insisted that Ochra, the mulatto girl, receive a wage for her services, which seemed as droll to Elizabeth as it was to Ochra. Nat made no special point of it, the wage was simply paid. Ochra solemnly received the silver coins, and after Nat had gone jingled them in her creased palm and went back to her stove with a queer African chortle of delight from her throat.

Life in Essex Street had passed brightly and happily for Elizabeth. In marrying Nat, she had acted instinctively, and it seemed to have been a right judgment.

Physically, there was the old, inordinate pain in her

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chest, as though a weight compressed her ribs, and before her eyes momentary specked blindness. But these spells were recurrent only after she had been too active, tried to do too much.

That she had become incurably consumptive, Nat understood; it made him quiet toward her, and considerate. Did she love him for that?

Elizabeth wondered dreamily in the garden and looked long at the lilac blooms on their stems. She wondered whether she were incapable of love. Perhaps she wanted only to be loved by Nat, to accede to his mood, and yield to him the new discovery of her soul.

It was a curious notion, but it persisted because of her perversity. With an inclination to be alone, she now and then found herself in a flood of feeling. But it would pass; her relationship with Nat had not brought satiety that could extinguish these periods; nor had the periods of longing altogether been subject to Nat's evocation. She wondered about love.

She had married the one man in Salem incapable of garrulity and yet gifted with a current of uninterrupted intensity. Over the carefully written pages of her husband's work she had more than once searched for some clew of interest that would suggest an idea that he would value and use. Despite her belief in their truth, among the delicate lines of Nat's diagrams and figures she was lost. It was Nat's fight for recognition that she understood, not the detail.

She wondered how deeply she loved Nat, in the sense Nat had always spoken of it: an attachment enriched by presence and fusion, and in pain during absence. Absence—there was a sharp wrench in her as she thought of Nat's absence.

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She must be utterly devoted to Nat at bottom. The possibility of Nat's going away again showed her infallibly the power of the attachment she had been turning in her mind as though it were a light thing. It made a kind of tumult and terror in her breathing that she found hard to quell, once aroused, even in the afternoon stillness of the garden. To an alien mind it might have seemed that she did not love Nat, for her to question herself this way, and that she was a romantic, enlisted by a difficult cause. But Elizabeth's attempts at candor with herself were part of her charm.

There was a stir behind the hedge of box that cut the garden from the house. Ochra's immense form parted the narrow way.

"Mr. Habakkuk Bowditch," mouthed Ochra in difficulty with the clumsy syllables. "Shall I send him through to the garden?"

"Yes, Ochra," Elizabeth said slowly, puzzled. She tried to think of what could have brought old Habakkuk. "Ochra," she called after the departing mulatto, "did you tell him Mr. Nathaniel was not here?"

"Yes, Miss Elizabeth. He asked for you."

Elizabeth nodded, and Ochra slipped through the box hedge.

III

Habakkuk returned the restrained greeting of his daughter-in-law with a direct look from his swollen eyes, and sat down heavily on a bench near her chair. He said nothing for a while, and rubbed his long hands together as they fell between his knees.

Habakkuk showed the marks of his advancing age in the way he smiled. He looked up at Elizabeth now, and his lips parted in a smile of unconcealed admiration

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that showed through the tangled edges of his unkempt beard and mustache. It was as if the unraveling process of senility had finally reached in him the simplicity and desires of adolescence again. Elizabeth felt the quality of the way he looked at her with annoyance and discomfort.

In response to her question, he answered thickly, as though addressing the earth beneath him.

"Cooperin' is dull for me," he sighed. "I can't do much steadily these days, with all my sons runnin' off to sea and leavin' an old man to struggle as best he can. But I ain't come to complain. I come to give you my weddin' present." He stopped the thoughtful rubbing of his long fingers, and looked again at Elizabeth directly.

"My son Nathaniel don't remember his mother. She was like you. Got took with consumptive fevers. No, Nat can't remember—"

Elizabeth leaned forward in her chair. "You mean that I have consumption?"

Habakkuk nodded. "Mr. Reed comes to my shop sometimes. He ain't too proud. I hear he's goin' into politics. Well, he told me."

Elizabeth flushed. It was a rather cold anger she felt. "And you think your experience might be of some benefit to Nat? Is that it?"

"I come to ask about your weddin' gift," returned Habakkuk slowly. "That's what I come for. If you'd like I'll make some gimcracks here for the garden. It ain't much fixed up. With cooperage so slow, I might turn to here."

It was true, the garden lacked the trellis that would give its entrance a delicate quality of removal. Eliza-

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beth forgot the presence of the old man who had stirred such a distinct revulsion in her, and fell to imagining pieces of white painted grille work that would stand against the dark green of the box.

"Or your doorway," went on Habakkuk. "It's too plain, and sick looking. I could put a fan-light in over the top of it if you wanted. I made my good wife's last days happy with them little tricks I picked up in idle hours at sea."

Elizabeth almost laughed outright. "Do I look like a corpse?" she cried gayly.

Habakkuk was like a dumb animal who was pleased that he had made her happy. With half-seriousness and earnest eyes, he went on. "Nathan Reed says how you were purty sick a while back."

"It is you who are near the grave, Father Habakkuk." Elizabeth used the familiar term, and it brought a glow to the yellow parchment skin, sunken in folds beneath his eyes.

"Over there," Habakkuk gestured toward the garden entrance, "I can make a little gimcrack fer y' to come through. Paint it, too, I can."

"Well," said Elizabeth, "that will be pleasant. I love my garden here, and I'm going to make it beautiful. We're going to have brick walks, as soon as Nathaniel can remember to bring the sand up from the beach to set the bricks. How will you carry the trellis around the turn of the hedge?"

Habakkuk rose stiffly and walked over to the gap in the box bushes. After a few minutes' thought, he muttered, "Can't tell 'forehand just how it's goin' to want to go. But it'll come as I git to workin' on it." He sighed. "Seems like 'twas all an old sailor could

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'do, putterin' in the garden. If I was younger, I'd be a coach maker. It'd be fun, what with all them new bright colors of paint they're gettin' to use now, an' fancy springs and doors."

IV

Later in the afternoon Nat returned and found Elizabeth in the garden.

"Your father has just left, Nat. You know, I like him." Elizabeth murmured into a lower voice as she saw Nat's frown of displeasure, and let her sentiment end in a nod.

"Did he come to ask you to see his curios?" asked Nat.

Elizabeth shook her head, and told him about the garden. "He said Nathan Reed was thinking of politics."

Nat laughed. "No, Reed may aim at that through his affectation of a law practice, but he will end a solemn judge. Politics are the living end of law—a judgeship, possibly less living but more secure."

Elizabeth paused in her answer while Nat sat down on the bench near her chair. "Usually," she finally said, "you seem to have so little use for politics."

"Ah-ha!" laughed Nat. "Politics is a live concern. We are building a navy to protect our commerce. You have not heard the news. Enos Briggs is commissioned to build the *Essex*, to be launched next spring. At Winter Island they start work in the next few days."

Elizabeth was overjoyed at the news. Her eyes shone with excitement. "A real frigate, a beautiful frigate," she said slowly.

"Yes," sighed Nat. "This X.Y.Z. affair seems to

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be taken seriously. 'Millions for defense but not one cent for tribute'—that oratorical answer seems to have caught hold."

"You mean the money for the *Essex* is being subscribed?" asked Elizabeth.

Nat nodded. "Mr. Gray and Mr. Derby start the list with ten thousand pounds apiece."

"I wonder if war will really come of it," remarked Elizabeth thoughtfully. "Guns fired, ships burned, and all that."

"It's just a parade," muttered Nat, "a silly strutting like little cocks. We'd better leave the *Essex* unbuilt, I feel, and build merchant vessels to take advantage of the high prices the privateers have caused in Mediterranean ports. We were talking of that to-day with Retire Becket at the beach."

Elizabeth rubbed her nose, then spread her dress smoothly over her knee, when the moment's impatience passed.

"Nat," she said, "we ought to see more of the people here. You ought to keep up your old friendship with the Reverend Prince and Dr. Bentley, with Nathan Reed too. Sometimes when you talk in that bitter sort of fun, I think you need to see more of the men in town. We two are living so alone. William Gray and Elias Derby could help you so much, and you're losing touch with the way they feel."

Nat smiled at his wife directly, and laid his hand on her arm. "You—Elizabeth—what's truly for me—you, I care about. The parade is all hypocrisy and lies and I can't stand it. Not with figures in my head at the same time. It's only you I want." He glanced eagerly at her face.

"What do you mean?" asked Elizabeth.

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"My work, that is my friendship with men. 'The American Practical Navigator,' when it is written. It may mean more than political overflows or sermons or nail machines. Toward other people, that, and what there is to follow—will stand for me. Is that not enough to give them—"

Elizabeth interrupted him. "I believe you will make a great gift, Nat."

Nat smiled. "In a way—it is yourself. Every diagram has your perfection in it. Every number I work for has your truth for its most minute finish."

"How many months do you think, Nat, before you can say the 'Navigator' is complete?"

"It may be a matter of years, Elizabeth. So much has to be newly calculated, fresh rules made, rules for ships, not observatories or Papist monks."

"Years? Didn't you say Mr. Blunt expected corrections for Moore's 'Navigator' in a few months?"

Nat waved his hand impatiently. "I do that to humor him. But by 1802 I think my work will be ready to have the first printing. Last night I made a table that showed the rate of progress, and five years more was the result."

"It seems so slow," said Elizabeth. "Enos Briggs will have built the *Essex* by that time, and long before; think how long it is."

"My dearest Elizabeth," returned Nat in a low voice, "I am making a tool; nothing fashion can change, not a ship to be outmodeled. It is putting your perfection into an everlasting form. I must do the whole work now. I must see it *whole*, for a long time ahead, do you understand?"

Nat was leaning forward; behind his eyes the intense

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flame of his purpose burned clear. The force of his features made it somber. Elizabeth felt blue heat from his eyes in her inmost heart.

"There are other things I want to do, but all of them start in this," Nat went on. "I may measure the universe, but my work is not with my eyes on anything but the perfected way of measure. Everything I do to put your perfection in my work must last. I choose figures because figures live beyond men; they are the simplest eternal reality."

Elizabeth rose from her chair, and kissed Nat. He held her for a minute. "I love you," he whispered, hoarse from the strain of emotion in his throat.

"You are tired, Nat, I can see it. You mustn't let these things pull you down so; the talk of the shipyard and what other men think important. I'm sorry I spoke to you the way I did about seeing them more often . . . I must go now, and see Ochra about the supper. But you stay here in the garden and rest."

V

"Did you ever think," remarked Nat over the supper table that evening, "how like my father Nathan Reed is?"

Elizabeth set down her glass. "Why, no. Nathan Reed seems to be a successful manufacturer of nails, and your father—he's always been a cooper since he gave up the sea, hasn't he?"

"Yes," answered Nat, as Ochra moved away from the table with the empty plates. He appeared to be looking narrowly at the steady flame of the candle-tips. "In a way they are different, and in another way they

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are much the same. At any rate, they are two who have been insurrectionists from the established order of life in Salem. My father's revolt was perhaps almost docile and unconscious. Reed has started away, and each time swung back. The end will probably show my father making fan-lights to decorate the doorways of the men who have used his empty barrels for gold. Reed, I am sure, if he remains in law, will be a judge and point out the right and wrong of questions that are indivisible that way, and which ultimately concern the contents of my father's barrels."

"Your father might have been a coach painter." Elizabeth smiled across the table. "That was what he told me this afternoon. And I prefer his fancy ideas to Nathan Reed's, almost as much as I prefer a ship from the hand of Enos Briggs to one from the yard of Retire Becket. That preference is so strong that the two men are absolutely separate to me."

"In ships you seem so at home, Elizabeth," said Nat. "To me the craft of seamanship is amazing and interesting, but its execution incredibly dull. If I should ever be master of a vessel, I want to leave the ship's routine handling entirely in the hands of my first mate."

"Isn't there any thrill in it for you, Nat?"

"As a boy I remember I was never thrilled, as you say, by a ship in the way most people are. The stories I heard of sailors, and I heard many from my father, never excited me so much as the overheard conversations about ship's business—mates talking on the deck about rigging, a sailor showing another how to reeve a tackle, or make an undersplice in the standing rigging, the cook complaining about wet potatoes." Nat lifted his glass of claret to the candlelight, and played with its stem in his fingers. "Now I like voyaging because

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it gives me so much uninterrupted work on my mathematics."

"Life aboard ship," agreed Elizabeth, "is well run, and much more advanced than shore living."

"What interruptions there are do not swallow the whole life itself?" queried Nat. "I don't know. But I do know this. I can get work done there that I should never attempt in Salem."

"Which means," said Elizabeth, putting her arm on the edge of the dark wood of the table, "that soon you will go to sea again. Weren't you talking about that this afternoon with Henry Prince?"

"In a general way," admitted Nat, "we were. Prince felt that, with all these European quarrels, France and England and Spain and the numerous privateers in the Mediterranean, a trip to—say, Cadiz or Alicante—for a brandy cargo would be almost as profitable as the Manila voyage was."

Elizabeth's face paled slightly. Her hand remained outstretched toward the base of one of the pewter candlesticks. "I suppose so," she nodded.

"We must have money, you see, to have our house. We are committed to Salem that far. We shall have children. Seafaring opens the only track that permits my work to go on, and still establishes you here—and happiness for all of us."

Elizabeth nodded again.

"However," went on Nat, "you mustn't be sad, you know. For if we sail in the *Astrea*, it will not be much before midsummer."

"You will go," said Elizabeth, raising her eyes. "You will go. And I wonder if it's too late already. You should have gone before— Now?"

Nat was so concerned with the economic issue of his

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departure that he did not understand Elizabeth's remark.

VI

The warm sun of July beat down on the sea-washed rocks of Salem. In the old gardens, the summer roses were full blown by noonday, and in the harbor the calm air kept the blue surface poised like glass. The streets were warm, and deserted by the time the sun reached its height.

It was close in the upstairs room where Nat hunched over his pine desk. His calculations were now simple multiplication and division—seeming endless operations to work out a set of tables gradually from which ready-made figures could be selected to fit his formulas. From the Manila voyage, he knew that men could be interested but not held—it had been the work of simple ciphering that in the end had caused his pupils to give up, and feel ridiculous.

If that voyage was to herald exact navigation, it was a failure, for in the taverns the men who had followed Nat's figures found that their revolt against being taught like children was ready food for any jest. They capitalized their own ridiculous situation, and gradually worked their horse-laugh around to Nat's puny frame and hollow chest. This coming to Derby's ears always made him smile inscrutably. With it, he appeased any discomfort at Prince's undeniable and dramatic success. Toward Nat, in their infrequent meetings, he continued a mild patronage. He never failed to inquire of the *navigator's* health. Derby remained non-committal, but in a way that would later permit him to espouse Nat's cause.

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Nat's present hard work at the dullest of tasks was the result of that sting. He realized inwardly that he had been a fool to try to teach a method of calculation. What he must do now, was work out every conceivable computation and simply index it all. Then there would be no teaching. He wanted to reduce the complex figuring to the simplicity that needed no persuasion other than its own ready value, no more teaching than the use of an index and of instruments. It was this way that he now thought of his ever-increasing "Practical Navigator."

The pages grew slowly, and meanwhile he endured silently the patronizing greetings from Derby, for the revenue that he might expect from the sale of his book through Blunt would be small indeed. With his wife, there were expenses, and he would have to go to sea again. Finally, he hoped for some vague and astonishing event to prove to his townsfolk the value of navigation. Without ever letting this event take shape in his mind, he vaguely considered it often, when the spent heat of a summer day made continuous multiplication impossible and even nauseous.

In Prince's visits to their house, Nat allowed Elizabeth most of the conversational burden, and contented himself with an occasional remark, that to a palate less optimistically prepared might have had the taste of iron in its water. There had been many months when Prince worried about his next command, when some time after the Manila voyage had ended Derby was pleasant but had spoken no definite words to him about another voyage. Toward Nat, Prince preserved his character of informer and adviser, and took any ambiguous wit from Nat as the innocent playfulness of a

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man overly given to thoughtful affairs, and not at all to be treated as having a cutting edge. Nat took care to preserve this impression. It was the first restriction of policy Nat had known in his life, the first time he had come to think about his affairs to make them work out to his advantage.

Now and then Nat would abruptly consider an open insult to Prince, and a break with Derby. He would give up the sea, give up the book on navigation, and go into trade. But he was shrewd enough to know that this could never be done until he had proved that his figures would work for ships. Until that happened, he could do nothing else. Whatever attraction renunciation of his struggle with obdurate maritime heads might have—going into trade would stop this necessity for endless multiplication sums and leave him free to follow out truly remote and alluring questions of science—Nat knew that he was too clearly marked as the champion of exact navigation to be ever thought of as a tradesman, or as anything but “unpractical,” “dreamer,” “fool.”

Of his nausea over limitless trivial computation he never spoke a word to Elizabeth, and similarly he held to himself the feeling of shame he could not avoid over his need to be thought well of by Derby. Of Captain Prince's visits, Elizabeth even gathered that Nat enjoyed them and took fun in making scorn of Prince's perpetual preoccupation with remaining in Derby's good graces illusive and invisible to Prince. Prince's endless concern, his unending speculations about what “might be on the old buzzard's mind,” Elizabeth deliberately fed and enjoyed; she drew Prince out into the most complete betrayals with relish.

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As to their future, even in the face of the small sum that dwindled each day, Elizabeth kept up the perverse optimism of one always shielded and provided for. She had refuge in her dresses and in the garden and in the fancies of her mind. And she thought of Nat as an international figure in science, as a "great" man, because of the foreign mathematical journals that came to their house. . . .

VII

The July morning had passed slowly for both Nat and Elizabeth. It was finally time for the noonday meal, and Elizabeth with a sigh of relief mounted the stair to the room where Nat worked.

She opened the door, and Nat laid aside his pencil and the sheet of paper outspread before him.

"I knew your step," he said, reaching up for her hand.

Elizabeth appeared to have something on her mind.

"You're not worried about my going on the *Astrea*, Elizabeth?" Nat asked, sensing the trouble in her dark eyes quickly. "You mustn't think of that yet. It's a month off—not till August."

"I'm worried about your father, Nat," returned Elizabeth. "Not that I don't think all morning of your going. I do. But your father was at work this morning in the garden putting up the trellis. I'm afraid . . . the heat. He seemed a little queer."

"That's maybe the result of a little Medford too early in the morning," replied Nat. "It's not the first time."

"No," said Elizabeth; "that is, I don't think it was that. He looked at me so queerly. He said—I was

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not his daughter but a mermaid. Imagine!" Elizabeth's laugh ended in a troubled look.

"It's the heat, I guess," said Nat. "The mermaid, you know, is the cause of all his sorrow. He met her once, I believe, off Funchal—or was it Barbados? I don't remember where. But it's not a new development."

"Perhaps you'd better go to the Tavern, Nat, before lunch, and just see if you find him there. I'd feel better if you would."

"Very well," replied Nat, and kissed the curved forearm of the slender hand that rested on the back of his chair, "I'll go."

VIII

Nat was several hours in returning. The hot day was full of the droning of bees about the flowers, and the sleepy hum and crackle of insects in the grass. These little noises seemed to draw out the time of Nat's absence for Elizabeth. In only another month, there would be many, many long summer days like this without Nat near. It made Elizabeth weak and dizzy to think of it—she who loved so to be by herself.

When she heard Nat's step up the walk she ran to meet him.

As soon as she saw his face she knew something had happened to Habakkuk.

"Where did you find him?" she asked hurriedly.

"I found him in the cooper's shop, in the corner that contains the curio cabinet. Poor man"—Nat's voice suddenly burst its calm, "he's dead."

Chapter Nineteen

I

SAILING of the *Astrea* had been planned for the fifteenth of August, but cargo delays caused postponement that alternated with daily expectation of departure. It was not until the twenty-first that the *Astrea* finally cast off and cleared for Cadiz and Alicant. The delays made the sensations of farewell multiplied for Elizabeth. Each day might be the last with Nat. The strain weakened her measurably; her taste for food vanished under it; sleep was fitful. She could not rest. Nat became depressed and uncomfortable as he saw violet shadows deepen and spread under her eyes. All he could do was reassure her of brief absence. Six months should accomplish the voyage—barring accident.

That was it—barring accident! Elizabeth was too familiar with ships not to know canvas powderbags from merchandise bales. Then she could see holes cut in the bulwark rail for cannon ports, and cleats fastened to the deck to hold the cannon steady against the recoil of a shot. She counted provision for nineteen cannon.

Other Salem merchants were beginning to re-equip their vessels for the hazardous trade. In September two would follow; in October three.

"You can send word to me at Alicant or Cadiz by one of these vessels," Nat had said. "We will still be

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loading brandy when they arrive. To feel sure of news will make going less difficult."

Elizabeth would not be dissuaded from accompanying Nat to the dock each morning, and she was there to meet him in the middle of the day, and in the evening, as though she saw clearly what was about to happen.

II

Henry Prince and Nat were seated in the after-cabin at the close of their evening meal. They were already ten days at sea. Broad Atlantic swells swept up under them, with a gentle rise and fall.

This riding movement was more perceptible in the cabin than on deck, for on deck the width of the vast waves distracted the eye from the slow ascending and descending journey of the vessel.

Henry Prince leaned back in his chair from the finished meal at the table as though more perfectly to join the lift and fall of his ship. From his eyes, too, it would seem, his mind was on her.

He sighed presently. "The *Astrea* will be outstyled in a few years," he said. "I suppose, if old Elias dies, his son will sell her. On another ship, I'd be lost, and an old man. Larger ships are being built—in a way, time has already passed us by. By introducing navigation, we might have been the men to be credited with making larger ships possible."

Nat sighed, and glanced up at Prince. "We can still make them earn more, put them in better favor."

Prince scratched his underlip, and looked as though he were seeing past Nat, rather than glancing directly at him. "I know, I know, but I hoped for something

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dramatic—suddenly a revolution in ideas, and we the forerunners. People in the town can *see* larger ships in the harbor, you know. And they'd point to us."

"And now—isn't there still chance?"

"Yes," Prince looked at the cabin wall, "but maybe not to accomplish it in the *Astrea*. I have the feeling I will never have another command. Just now, with vessels changing so, a man grows old quickly. It's not as it used to be."

"You cannot be sure of the future—"

"I will go out of service when the *Astrea* does," replied Prince with decision.

"Which offers incentive," remarked Nat dryly, "for making this voyage very successful financially."

Prince nodded. "You, too, must prosper while there's time."

Nat laughed. "Oh, I'll survive the *Astrea*. You know, I was telling Elizabeth one evening, I believe if my voyages should end, I'd lose confidence in myself without knowing it until too late. I mean, I need to be by myself for long periods of time really to fathom out a new idea. In science, ideas come so unsought. This life at sea is ideal, because your mind is always peacefully at work."

"Sometimes, Nat," replied Prince thoughtfully, "I think you are a cold fish, without feeling almost entirely. The *Astrea* really means little to you."

Nat admitted that another vessel would serve his purpose if he only had equal leisure. "I have no special reason to love the *Astrea*," he added a little bitterly.

"You wouldn't care if she sank," returned Prince.

"I suppose so," was Nat's answer.

Prince poured the light Madeira from the silver-

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stoppered decanter. "All sailors who have been to sea are hard. But there are a few soft spots in them even if it takes rum to uncover them. The wide ocean, before a seagoing man's eyes for so many days, gives us these soft spots. You have your figures, Habakkuk had his mermaid, and I—I have my *Astrea*."

Nat watched Henry Prince light a cheroot. "That sounds as though you couldn't disprove it," remarked Nat with a smile.

Henry Prince laid aside his cheroot and bent forward to look into his wine. He raised the glass to his lips and drank.

Nat went on. "Maybe it happens this way. So much loneliness, so much thinking, naturally finds one place to revolve, a set of circumstances that are favorites in reflective periods, and into which we pour the rest of life. It's sentimental, and not a very pleasant thing for an intelligent man to look forward to."

Prince sighed and looked up. "Nat, you're not teaching the crew navigation this trip? I notice you work out the sights alone."

Nat wrinkled his lip a moment as though for a tart answer. Then it relaxed. "I will not teach any man," he answered simply. "A few have asked me questions—Eaton for one, the Azores boy whose name you changed from Benito to make the crew American. He asks a great many questions."

"But what will happen," inquired Prince with slight impatience, "to all that you have promised—that I too, in a way, have promised—to prove. If we can't convince our crew, there is so little chance for the idea. You see—our excellent time is put down to luck or what not. Any man can have luck."

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Nat nodded a little hopelessly. "I know. It doesn't look as though I'd ever really convince them. But the book, when it is done, will be always ready for any one who wants it, and one by one they may pick it up."

"What we need to do," returned Prince, "is something impossible, some unbelievable feat, like coming into Salem Harbor in a snowstorm without a sight of land, let's say. Be so sure of our position after crossing the ocean that we don't need a landfall, and sail right up to the Derby wharf. A thick blowing fog would serve as well."

"First you only wanted to control a few ignorant, stubborn men," said Nat; "now it's the weather."

"I'm serious, Nat," Prince replied. "Listen. A fool can see that Derby is getting old. Do you realize that his sons or William Gray, when they come into ownership of the *Astrea*, will scrap her? I will be towed into a tidewater marsh with her, to rot with her timbers. The *Astrea* must do something—or—you and I will quickly be forgotten. Commanders are young men."

"What do you propose?" asked Nat.

"Well, suppose you teach this cook navigation, and let him navigate the *Astrea* back to Salem in remarkable time. You could teach him."

Nat nodded.

"Well, can't you see that a shipmaster must not stand still? He can do it no more than his ship can. He must go ahead or astern. It is not enough to be able to do good work, and make successful trips—you must do it in a new way. That's what catches the eye."

"If we make money this voyage, if we do as well as

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we figured," asked Nat after a short pause, "won't you be able to retire—if you should lose command?"

Prince nodded briefly. "We must do very well indeed for that. If I retire now, I want a big house, the best furniture to be had. I want good wine, and waistcoats. And I don't want to think of expense every time I light a cheroot or take a pinch of snuff."

Nat looked at Prince's face for a moment, struck by its sudden lack of reserve, and its honesty. "All right," he answered, "I'll go on working, and maybe on the way back we can think of something to do."

Prince sank back in his chair, more at ease. "You can do something wonderful, Nat; it is in you. I've always felt that way. I still count on you."

III

The revolution in France had made all Europe unfriendly to the new Gallic republic. Spain, however, was allied with her. And for this reason England cruised the waters around Gibraltar unceasingly. The Earl St. Vincent's fleet was spread in a close-traveled course about the entrance of the Strait to protect English vessels from the numerous privateers that were on watch for any booty they could capture with the legalized piracy of their privateer's commission.

Accordingly, as the *Astrea* neared these waters, double watches were set, lest a privateer take them unaware. As they neared the Spanish coast, they observed the Earl St. Vincent's fleet, and were able to identify it, fortunately, without undue alarm. If the vessels had been sighted at night, it would have been less easy to distinguish them from privateers.

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Later in the day an American vessel was sighted, beating up the coast toward Cadiz. The *Astrea* received a visit from her master, which confirmed Prince's suspicion, that privateers were numerous in the waters of the Strait. It was decided to go to Cadiz first, and trade there until a convoy might be formed. For that purpose, Prince sailed toward the *Hector*, the nearest vessel to them in the English fleet, and from her Captain Camel received a passport to enter Cadiz.

On the afternoon of September twenty-first, the *Astrea* dropped her anchor in that harbor without event. Prince and his supercargo were soon completing arrangements for trade in the town: Spain's condition was miserable, and the supplies the *Astrea* carried were received at excellent exchange for brandy.

They had been in Cadiz but little over a fortnight, when the news came of the destruction of the French Fleet in the Mediterranean by Nelson. This victory of the English had the effect of making Spain more than ever lament the position of friendliness she had undertaken toward her Gallic neighbor, and eager to encourage the new commercial contacts offered by the Americans. The trade proceeded briskly on board the *Astrea*, as well as on three other American vessels in the harbor.

By November, all four ships were ready to clear for the hazardous run to Alicant. Several other Salem arrivals were expected in Cadiz, and departure was delayed for some time so that all might sail to Alicant together. After a week of waiting without result, Prince left word that the wisest course was for the arrivals to make their way to Alicant directly, following the convoy, and stop for cargo at Cadiz on their return.

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The three American ships sailed out under the armed protection of the *Astrea*, and by the twelfth were on their course to Gibraltar and the southeastern Spanish coast that led to Alicante.

On the fourteenth, the four ships fell in again with the English fleet. On the next day another convoy of twenty vessels was sighted, and two of those accompanying the *Astrea* joined it, leaving the *Astrea* to follow with the one ship that was the slowest. On the eighteenth, the whole convoy entered the Strait, except one that was pursued by ten privateers that hovered to leeward in full sight.

The following night was bright and flooded with moonlight. A light breeze stirred the sails and made shining ripples across the moon path in the water. Prince had been uneasy all day; with the slight haze in the morning, he feared the privateers had managed to work to windward of him. With his glass under his arm, he walked the quarterdeck restlessly.

Suddenly a dark shadow was made out moving toward the *Astrea*, and the call to quarters was sounded. The decks were cleared, and the cannon rolled into place.

Prince assigned Nat to a station in the cabin, where he could pass powder to the various guns through the cabin lights. It would be quick-witted and nervous work to keep all supplied, and there was always the danger that an enemy shot might splinter the cabin and set off the powder magazine.

Each man stood by his post silently, looking out over the bright rippled water toward the slowly approaching shadow of the privateer.

Finally, Henry Prince gave the word to set off one

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of the charged cannon. A trial shot might head off the privateer; she would ordinarily avoid engagement with an armed merchantman.

The shot splashed up the placid water halfway between the two vessels. Prince did not move his eye from the telescope, and anxiously awaited the effect of their challenge.

The dark shadow of canvas luffed imperceptibly. She was swinging up in the wind, and would doubtless veer off. Henry Prince trembled with excitement. It would not do to tell the men yet, but he wanted to get word to Nat.

After another hastily confirmed glance, he hurried to the cabin with the news that the privateer had been put off.

To his amazement, he found Nat sitting at his station by the powder with a slate on his knee, busily figuring.

Prince burst into a laugh.

Nat looked up quickly, with a perplexed frown at the interruption.

IV

Being chased by privateers coupled with unfavorable gales, the *Astrea* was driven off her course far to the southeast. When the hills of Malaga and the port of Alicant finally came into sight, according to Nat's reckoning, the two vessels would have reached port that preceded the *Astrea* when they left her with the third and slowest. Also later arrivals at Cadiz would have had time to reach Alicant, and, by escaping the effect of adverse winds, have sailed already directly into port.

He awaited landing impatiently, for there might be news of Elizabeth. There would certainly be a mes-

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sage for him by these vessels that had left Salem in October.

Every indication pointed to the voyage being most prosperous, and he was eager to have the assurance that Elizabeth was well, to clear his mind from worry, and free him again for the heart of his calculations.

There was further delay in landing; after an involved dispute with the city authorities, fearsome of disease being brought into the place, the crew of the *Astrea* was at length allowed to go on shore. A case of mumps on one of the preceding vessels was the root of the trouble with port officers, whose fee had to be doubled before they would even board the *Astrea*.

Nat eagerly scanned the ships at anchor. He recognized several from Salem that had sailed after the *Astrea*, probably in October. On the evening of the second day he put off in the long-boat for the shore, promising immediate return as soon as he discovered if there was news from Elizabeth. Prince, seeing Nat's concern, decided it was best he go alone. If there were bad news, Prince felt Nat would weather it better without any one with him. Prince decided, therefore, to postpone his shore visit until the morning, and remained on deck awaiting Nat's return. He proposed a bottle of old Cacavilla for dinner. As the skiff drew away from the shadow of the *Astrea's* hull, Nat's assent floated back to him.

V

As the interval of Nat's absence lengthened, Prince grew restless. He noticed the sound of the rigging against the mast, the slow tattoo it beat. He had not heard it before. Such things disturbed him; made his

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hands cold and his leg twitch now and then. Slight recurrent sounds persisted in drawing him out into the night—the fresh curl of a little harbor wave breaking in the dark. It was so silly, he told himself. Such little fears were so diminishing to his value, his use; he must consider the possibility of Nat's return with bad news. No, as he recalled Elizabeth's eyes on the day of sailing, no, he might as well consider the possibility of her death. It was an effort to say the word, but it appeased the intrusion of the night.

Between the two men only vague words had passed on the subject of Elizabeth's lung fever, but Prince knew her death must be only a matter of time, and that it was this realization dimly felt that had made Nat reluctant to leave on this voyage.

What would happen to Nat? The incident would be covered with danger. Prince had feared this specific thing always—heretofore unnamed. He wondered hopelessly whether it would completely explode Nat, or dissolve him. He could do better than this vague imagining. He could grip it down to a picture for himself. If he should give up the *Astrea*, if he should lose his considerable fortune, and face the strange decks and new ropes of another vessel as a mate, what would happen to him? With an unbidden approach, the aspect of old Habakkuk in the Sun Tavern occurred in his mind. Yes, he could understand that, almost relish the anonymous poverty of it. . . .

Nat had been unpredictable in other things. The incident with Ben Crowninshield, after Ben's public remark about Elizabeth, revealed enough of Nat's mystery to reassure Prince against the too clear parallel of Habakkuk by his son.

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Was he, after all, presuming too much, in facing the possibility of Elizabeth's death; was he but the victim of a mood?

The *Astrea* swung slightly at her anchor with a veer of the wind. Prince watched the ripples splash up against her side as the dark water slipped under her.

Wealth—that was the answer for him. If command of the *Astrea* passed from his hand, there was the resource of an elaborate house, the ornament of its walls, and the talk over the candelabra on the table. It was this to which he would turn, he felt; it would shut the night out and inclose a manner.

But this was not the hope he had once cherished. It was not the thing for which he had so coupled his fate to Nat's. It was not, he reminded himself, the fulfillment of his earlier slogan—it was not Salem under his feet. It was Salem passing him by.

He remembered Nat and Elizabeth standing on the pierhead together, with locked hands, looking at each other for the brief moment of parting. No kiss, no show of embrace to diffuse or expend the concentrated current between their eyes—only distance to lengthen it.

He remembered the pain in Elizabeth's face.

Prince scanned the water closely for sight of Nat's returning skiff. He listened for oars rumbling against tholepins, and fancied he heard the strokes.

He suddenly called the sailor on anchor watch aft.

"Eaton, when Mr. Bowditch comes aboard, tell him that I'm in the cabin, and that dinner is ready."

Prince disappeared down the companion ladder, and slowly took his place by the table. He unstopped the engraved glass decanter, and filled it from the

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opened bottle of Cacavilla. His practiced hand poured the mellow wine slowly, in a thin stream.

He had barely finished when he heard the bump of the skiff against the hull of the *Astrea*, and the clatter of boated oars.

There was an interval before Nat appeared. Prince heard his descending step in the companionway. Directly Prince saw his slight figure, and disheveled gray hair framed in the dark teak borders of the mess-cabin doorway. From Nat's silent disconnected glance, Prince felt sure that his earlier premonition on the deck had truth in it.

Nat was such a cool fish; if only he were less remote, Prince felt he might have prepared him. He had never been able to speak to Nat about Elizabeth—and it did not seem that the time had come now.

Nat took his place at the table quietly, still with wandering, bewildered eyes. But he seemed calm; there was no trace of a devouring grief in his face. It was simply bad news, reasoned Prince. Elizabeth was sick, not dead. He was warmly reassured, and the stricture of the moment left him. He must simply divert Nat's mind from the worry. That was all that could be done.

As the food was set on the table in a central platter, Prince poured out a glass of wine for Nat, and began to talk of the anchorage and how uncertain it seemed. In the morning it would be wise to drop a kedge, and warp to a better lee.

Nat seemed to hear, but he offered no comment. Prince went on to outline the scheme of setting out the kedge anchor in the long-boat, the tackle they should need.

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Nat ate a few mouthfuls of food, and then appeared to forget the plate in front of him.

Suddenly he began to speak, after a slight effort with his lips: "She's dead. Elizabeth is dead. I can't understand it. I don't see . . ." He put his hand to his throat with a jerk, and rose from the table. He pressed the fingers of one hand tightly, convulsively, with the other. Nat's lips stopped moving, his forehead shone with sudden beads of sweat.

Queerly, the realization of his news seemed to strike him in the stomach, with incredible physical anguish that utterly unsettled him.

He dropped his hand to the table edge to steady himself while the black spell passed over him. When he opened his eyes, he could see only the cabin door. He started forward toward it sharply; Prince at the same time to catch his arm and steady him . . .

Late that night Nat rose from his bunk and lighted a candle. He sat down at his writing desk and opened up the log in which he recorded his daily reckonings.

"Dec. 4, 1798," he wrote in painful effort to restore sanity. "I have received the melancholy news of the death of my wife." Bewildered, he wrote on, "there were no letters from my friends." He paused. "I could not learn particularly the day of her death—"

The fine-pointed quill fell from his hand, and remained before the opened log, alone, motionless.

Chapter Twenty

I

THREE years after the *Astrea* had docked at the Derby wharf, from her voyage to Alicant, Nat found himself face to face with his old friend Nathan Reed. They were sitting opposite each other at the Sun Tavern. Reed had been recently appointed to a federal judgeship after having exhausted the honors due a representative in Congress. The two men recognized each other with some surprise, for Nathan Reed seemed to Nat to have aged incredibly in the few years since he had last seen him, and Nat's face seemed to Reed quite startling in its new characteristics.

Nat's face was still smooth shaven, but there were lines in it, particularly about the mouth, and the eyes. They were lines both of concentration and of shrewdness—almost a love of power showed in them. The curious combination of high, ascetic forehead, and the shrewd eyes and reserved mouth, could suggest to Reed only a counterpart in the portrait of some early Roman bishop. His forehead was more bald now, and gave the heavy arch of his brow a higher cast, accented too the sharpness of the straight downward line of his nose.

They talked for some minutes, then Nat inquired why Reed had come back to Salem.

Reed smiled. "I wanted to see the shop, Nat, where we used to work when I came back to Salem from college—where I made the model steamboat."

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"It's been torn down," put in Nat.

"Yes, it has," replied Reed slowly. "But Washington Hall is still standing. Do you know, I remember a curious thing about that Hall. I remember the night I went to see a performance there of a tight-rope walker. I even remember he called himself the American Balance Master. Blast my bones! but I remember how Elizabeth and I held our breath as he did his tricks. We must have been children then." Reed rubbed his nose philosophically. "I think it was after that performance we became engaged. Elizabeth clung to my arm at a particularly exciting moment."

Nat laughed. "I remember it too. You were my idol then. And how I damned you for leaving your experiments and mechanics to go with a girl! I thought you as ridiculous as the clown you went to see."

Reed coughed a little uncomfortably, and stirred in his chair. He had grown quite stout, and the effort of his cough vibrated the thick watch chain on his figured waistcoat.

"Tell me, Nat," he said, "how you are doing. Has Blunt sold many copies of the 'Navigator'?"

Nat shook his head, a little despondently. "No," he said slowly, "it does well, but there is not much money from it. They use it in Boston a good deal, but the people here are still quite scornful of the idea that it's of any practical use."

"I saw in the paper," muttered Reed, "when Harvard gave you a degree for it. And you're a member of the Academy. Your scientific work goes on still in mathematics?"

Nat nodded. "It always will."

Reed drank a sip of Medford hastily. When he had

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put down his glass, he started the conversation from a new angle.

"You are still quite a young man, Nat, for all your gray hair," he said.

"Twenty-eight," supplied Nat.

"Well," went on Reed, "you have given up the sea?"

Nat poured a drink for himself and nodded indecisively.

"I understand, my boy, you need a job, don't you? Now I had dinner last night with William Gray, and I understand he wants to start an insurance company, a marine insurance company. With all your mathematical gift, I should think you'd be an ideal man for him, to work out the rates, and calculate loss expectations. He spoke quite warmly of you too. I must mention the idea to him."

Reed's pompous political manner of speech, retarded even more now by the more judicial manner, had used up Nat's patience. He rose from the table suddenly.

"You must leave?" asked Reed kindly. "Well, you have my most earnest wishes for success, Nat."

Nat looked hard at Reed's puffy red face for a moment. "Not yet—I can't yet be a clown like you!" he exploded, and turned on his heel.

Reed watched him leave the tavern with amazement. As quick as Nat's thin body had slipped through the door, he remembered his dignity, and turned around to see if any had witnessed the humiliating insult he had received.

II

Late in the afternoon of a December day, in the following year, Henry Prince sat in the library of his

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house wondering about Nat, and trying to piece together for his own satisfaction an explanation of the things that had happened since their return from Alicant, four years ago.

As the years passed, Henry Prince, always of reflective mood, found himself leaning more and more to the quiet, often perverse, meanings that became lodged in his mind. Just as a Yankee calker must have his way at joining parted seams in a hull, so Prince held tenaciously to images until their leaks were stopped and they floated off in his mind with a life of their own, like the toy ships of his youth.

The passing of years had filled in with comparative accuracy the prophecy he had made on the *Astrea's* deck in the wind-touched harbor of Alicant, of the future when the *Astrea* should leave his command. After Derby's death succeeding their return from the brandy voyage, the *Astrea* had been sold. Prince had made one voyage for the new Boston owners to Batavia and Manila. Truly, the *Astrea* slipped out of fashion in favor of the larger East Indiamen. Prince regretfully parted from his supercargo, and ended his sea connection with Nat with that voyage.

In the succeeding years, however, he had ventured several minor investments with Nat in hide cargoes, a seal expedition, but the success was limited by the shore direction. It appeared Nat was reluctant to go to sea, and Prince was definitely committed to end his days in the spacious rooms of the house he had constructed.

Prince thought of Nat now, as though he were trying to salvage a part of his own life. It was so curious, the power in Nat that had somehow always inspired him to make his own career spectacular. He settled back in his chair, a Windsor chair that suited him nicely.

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There was by this chair, laden with charts and books, a shallow table with tapering legs, turned from walnut. Prince seldom read the books; the charts were more frequently spread out. His finger would trace a course once followed, and stop, pause somewhere in the Indies, over a familiar name.

On the walls there were three old portraits. A sail plan of the *Astrea* hung between two miniature cabin lamps mounted on proper brass gimbals.

There were no carpets in this room; the wide oak planks were as bare and simple as the cleared deck of a ship. Only they were waxed and kept highly polished. The wide mantel that topped the stone fireplace was carved in delicate running pattern of sea-horses. Above the mantel hung the salt-eaten ship's bell from the *Astrea*. A sawed log stump rested at one corner of the fireplace, left for service as a chair.

Another walnut table opposite the fireplace and at one side of the Windsor chair—with the tall windows between—held a wine service and a decanter of engraved glass with a dull silver stopper. It was usually half full of light Madeira or the richer ruby red of a Spanish wine.

It was quiet in Henry Prince's study, almost unnaturally quiet. The last light of a winter afternoon drifted in crimson stain across the snow outside and fell in long marks on the polished surface of the floor.

But a few weeks before, it seemed, although it was over six months, Prince had received a peculiarly complete glimpse of the struggle that had gone on in Nat, incommunicably, grimly, since the evening in Alicant—almost the only direct revelation.

To say that it was the first was not wholly correct, reflected Prince. Thinking not of hints or half-sur-

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mised conclusions, there had been several quite outspoken incidents.

For instance, there was the note that Nat sent Francis Boardman shortly after the return from Alicant, the import of which Captain Boardman's anger published. Nat had returned Elizabeth's chair, the articles of furniture and plate and table damask, scrupulously—everything that had been Elizabeth's—to the Boardman house. "I do not feel justified," his words had been, "in retaining for my use these articles in view of an alliance so abruptly terminated."

It was not any moral scruple, of course, nor was it that Nat failed in courage to live with these objects Elizabeth had loved.

Captain Boardman had insensitively made Nat's absence the subject of reproach. "Nat was as bad as his father." There was a thing in Nat to fly out wild now. It did. Nat did not care; and gave his insult the ironic sting of listed accuracy.

There was a bitter wild thing lodged now in his mind, fed out of memory. This inner wildness had never left him. It struck out always with mathematical aim.

His election to the Academy had been the incident that gave Nat the motive force to leave Salem again with Prince for their last voyage together in the *Astrea*. He would make his first communication to the Academy, his method of working lunars. The honor reconciled him to face the loneliness and inviewing hours on the moving similar ocean. To view in for the plan of his idea meant the sight not only of that diagram, but of Elizabeth's smile.

Prince, of course, did not know this; what he saw

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was only the mark of terror on Nat's face after he had been working for long on a problem. Prince did not need any degree of intuition to see that deep study awakened the pain of memory.

Prince remembered clearly the heat of Nat's resolve to quit the sea forever after this voyage. Nothing on earth could drive him to face again those hours alone, it seemed. However, his return to Salem in 1800 witnessed the publication of the communication to the Academy that he had perfected at sea. In October of that year, exactly ten days after the fourth anniversary of Elizabeth's death, he suddenly married his cousin in Danvers, Mary Ingersoll, now nineteen. A mad catharsis? wondered Prince. Or was it the craving of memory to duplicate an ideal of the body?

Prince was privately convinced that Nat was unbalanced, driven like a mad creature by memory of touch, to have again in the Essex Street house the laughter, the texture, of a woman. It would save him from hell.

Prince's suavity of manner did not fail him when the hurried wedding was announced. He maintained always now the ridiculous manner of ease reputed to be in favor in London.

"I suppose," he had said to Nat in the tensivity of the first information, "that now you are rectifying that slight breach of etiquette at Mary's christening. Do you remember how you complained once to me that it was remembered so endlessly by your Uncle Jonathan?"

Inadequate substitution as this marriage might be, Prince could not fail to remember that two years after the ceremony Edward Blunt had issued the first edition of the "American Practical Navigator."

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For in the period following Nat's marriage to Mary, the scattered data of his years of creative labor had been assembled, and put forward as a new thing. "Navigation," Prince murmured to himself from the taut definition, "affords the knowledge necessary to conduct a ship from point to point upon the earth, enabling the mariner . . ."

The book was unevenly received. Harvard University had come forward with a master's degree, and Blunt announced that Moore's "Navigator," measured against the work of Bowditch, disclosed over eight thousand errors. Salem masters were unconvinced, Salem owners tolerant and slightly amused.

Nat's business ventures with Henry Prince never opened a trace of conversation that might yield the manner to a passionate moment of honesty or answer. Nat was bitterly silent if the conversation chanced to turn toward himself.

With all this, Nat seemed to be accepting his connection with Salem. But each adaptation and joining he could not make without some inner ruthlessness.

A sardonic and bitter flare-up resulted in his expulsion from membership on the school committee. It seemed he could not speak his mind without a mathematical aim that struck when a person who omitted reason became the target. Still, Salem slowly enveloped him. Figures did not change; he did not care, he said.

Then came a stroke of business.

Nat proved to William Gray how profitable the purchase of the *Putnam* would be, just how successful a pepper voyage could be made to Sumatra in this craft newly built at Danvers.

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A syndicate was formed; several others joined with Gray and Prince and Nat; the vessel and cargo worth fifty-six thousand dollars were acquired.

Apparently, the only way Nat could retain his place in the syndicate, lacking sufficient funds, would be to sail as master. Again to be at sea. . . .

It had been Prince who had voiced this suggestion. The look of pain that came into Nat's face at his friend's words had been unforgettable. A shadow—just a slight twinge—but to Prince's sensitive eye it showed the suffering that lay so deeply below the surface.

Why had Prince persisted then? For it was really a strategy of his that worked upon Nat and persuaded him to his decision. It was hard to tell why you did things, reflected Prince. There were queer unconscious tides of will one did not always realize.

Prince had quickly taken the moment of Nat's first stab of returning memory as the moment to divert him, prevent the probe of recollection and images of the past from cutting deeper.

"How about the translation of La Place's '*Mécanique Céleste*'?" Prince interjected quickly.

Blunt had lately sent to Nat this most ambitious work of the famous Marquis La Place, and Prince had listened to Nat's glowing words about the new possibilities in science it opened.

"A mathematical scheme of the universe," murmured Nat now, his mind yielding to the sudden push Prince had given it. "But it is the work of years to translate La Place, to expand all that he touches into the full implications. You mean," he concluded, looking

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up at Prince, "that on the voyage I could find leisure to make the start?"

Prince had nodded, watching Nat's eyes slowly burn with the possibility Prince's remark opened so casually. To translate La Place would be the means of producing a practical navigator for astral bodies—a work that would cross over into the realm of pure science—a work that need not be limited by the intelligence of seamen, but one that would be directed to the foremost mathematical minds of the world.

"In routine matters," remarked Prince, "you would find a mate relieving you of the active responsibilities of command. You would have time to think through all La Place has done."

When Nat gave his assent to command, with a slow nod of his head, Prince felt elated. It had been a fine stroke of business to secure Nat as commander, for Prince well knew the complicated accounts of a pepper voyage, and the exactitude with which Nat would have them rendered. And from Nat's point of view, there was the almost sure profit Nat himself had so clearly figured, and, at the time, Prince believed, a healing happiness in renewed work as well.

But when Prince saw the *Putnam* clear from Hill's wharf in Beverly on a raw November day in 1802, it was not without violent misgiving in his heart for Nat.

Before he had sailed, Nat had shown Prince that the avenging ghost of Elizabeth would come alive on the voyage. The pain of an unattainable illusion would haunt the edges of every diagram, in the depths of every concentration, a mouth smiling with promise . . . That final parting with Nat, when he had spoken out, was unforgetably etched in Prince's memory.

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III

But before recalling that scene, Prince's mind preferred to consider Mary . . .

Instead of showing visitors to the Bowditch house finely made furniture, or China wall paper, or English crystal, Mary showed them proudly the learned volumes her husband had imported. Mary was most aptly suited to make plausible with reckless enthusiasm an attachment of Nat to the ideals of Salem; the religious, domestic felicity and simple-living formula glowed under her magic touch, Prince reflected.

With Nat away it seemed that Mary Ingersoll gathered courage and victory over what doubts she might have had of Nat's devotion and love. She explained to all who came in her house, the ideality of her husband in every virtue known or mentioned in the meetings of the Female Charitable Society. Nat became for her, gradually, the exact embodiment of her constant wish; with each incidental recital, he actually received the form of it as though he were altered in the flesh.

And her father was pleased with the happiness of his daughter. Jonathan Ingersoll excused his permission to an alliance of his blood with a descendant of Habakkuk, because Nat's industry was fabulous, because the love between Mary and Nat was so like a picture from the catechism, because Salem would one day receive fame from Nat's learning. He predicted for Nat's return an active position in the church. Dr. Bentley might look forward to an exemplary parishioner, and a renewed friendship.

Mary, with her intuitive happiness, seemed to sense

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what ideal might stir each neighbor. In this way, the figure of Nat took on living color and form in the minds of his townsmen; the materials of an image unshakable, unassailable, even by Nat.

IV

The day before Nat had sailed, he had been in Prince's library. Prince had affected an interest in politics opposite to Nat's Federalism in the early part of their conversation. Nat seemed so hunted, so driven, walking moodily the polished floor.

Prince sought to sting him by this means to what he laughingly referred to as behavior fit for a decent citizen of Salem.

Nat did not hear. The nights of the coming voyage were before him. And the *Astrea*—her sail plan hung on the wall, and over the mantel—the bell that had struck out the hours from Alicant.

Prince had risen and passed to the walnut table that held the wine service and the decanter.

He held the decanter up against the afternoon sun that lengthened down toward the window's level. In the engraving of the glass there seemed to linger a light that originated in the glass, intensified back into the ruby wine with scarlet shafts of brilliance.

"Come, Nat," he had said. "When we were very little boys, and were unhappy, we could cry—do you remember how whole-heartedly? I often wonder why older people do not cry: I'm aware that what I say is most absurdly not the part of a man. But, after all, why not? It is so simple!"

Prince paused, and suddenly set the decanter down

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on the table, aghast, shocked, at the face Nat turned toward him: flushed with blood as though overheated, the normally quiescent lips snarled and curled over each other like a beast in racking torture, the whole face contorted and condensed into the eyes. Wild eyes, unfocused—staring ahead to nowhere.

The paralysis of the look gradually gave place to vague purpose—as though, in a moment, Nat would speak.

The words, when they came, were somehow in the voice of another man, guttural, stuttered, confused upon his lips with little specks of spit.

“Elizabeth is dead.” He finally had been able to say it.

With an incredible tracing of horror, his voice suddenly shot and whirled into a high wail. “Dead, you hear! That old witch my grandmother is trying to frighten me. It isn’t Elizabeth’s skull she has in her hand, it’s the skull of an Indian. Not Elizabeth’s skull—”

Prince overcame the queer loss of will this wild crying voice had given him. Slowly he walked forward toward the spot where Nat stood.

But Nat eluded his hand, his fingers, with a supple twist of his body. Prince watched Nat’s slowly steady-ing course as he walked across the polished floor to the doorway.

“Elizabeth,” Nat cried to himself, with the question of a child, “you are not dead?”

The next day he had sailed.

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V

Of Nat himself, at sea on the *Putnam*, Prince could not even surmise.

As a matter of fact, after the first few days at sea the routine of adjusting ship and men to the long voyage ahead seemed to have softened the wrench of adaptation, to have smoothed the transition back into what might have been, and still could be, an environment full of the darker forces of the world, that could close in on Nat with terrifying images. As the monotony of the day's run commenced, Nat found himself immersed in the French of La Place. He was able to read voraciously.

But during the swing up from Good Hope, as Nat dug deeper into the meaning of La Place, and commenced to form the first creative plans for his commentary, he found himself more moody, more easily lulled by the slow roll of the ship into long trains of unproductive thought. He would recover from these hours of abstraction with a vague wondering. What had he been thinking of?

He sharply recalled himself to his work, and forced his mind to bite anew into frontiers of the incalculable. But instead of being a fine flower of delicate, ordered, clear, mathematical thinking, Nat found his work becoming always a fight—a fight against a curious lassitude of mind that was strange kin to that lassitude bred in the body by a long fever.

At irregular hours he came on deck, and paced restlessly, fighting now quite definitely what he felt to be the waning power of his mind. Unnerving, perhaps

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the most tragic feeling man knows, this subtle fear ate its way into his consciousness.

Hours wasted in fruitless pacing of the deck, gazing over the wide shadowed ocean, lost, when here—now—there was before him a great opportunity. Nat became angry with himself. He forced his brain through long calculations to steel it and give it edge.

At anchor in Sumatra, waiting his turn for the native Dattoo between weighings, Nat wondered nervously about the future, a future empty of accomplishment. A bitter despair took him with sudden panic-like fright at times. He had made the contribution of navigation to the common sea-faring world in which circumstance and time had placed him. It was supremely simple, workable, and yet it had not brought recognition.

There remained this opportunity to grasp—the “*Mécanique Céleste*”—whose thrilling depths were poetry to him—an opportunity to contribute to the mathematical thinking of the world. And this was twisting wretchedly out of his fingers.

With cargo completed, the long voyage homeward was under way. Within Nat this crisis of his life was rising in pitch with each sleepless night of struggle.

It was more clear to him now what had happened in this sudden isolation upon the ocean, this intense effort to find again the stride of creative work. The work at the “*Mécanique*” had set loose a tide in him that his nature unconsciously shrank from, a tide that bore old buried things to the surface. His longing to grasp the truth of an idea thus coupled irretrievably with what he must forget. He must forget Elizabeth.

He could not forget Elizabeth now she had come to

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the surface of his mind. Every night at his work Elizabeth seemed to be with him. Cut off by the ferocity of this struggle within him from any easy contact with his fellow men aboard the *Putnam*, his loneliness knew no relief. He could not forget Elizabeth. Each little incident they had shared had an edge that was gifted with a peculiar immortality. His first touch of Elizabeth's arm . . . the blue merino shawl . . . the kiss she had returned, from where she sat, in the carved chair . . . These pictures came to his mind against the strongest contriving of his will.

Every concentration over the "Mécanique" was slowly disturbed and transferred to the image of Elizabeth.

His marriage to Mary had been an inebriate, overwhelming desire to satisfy this blind aching memory of his body. She might have been any one.

With each day of furrowed water behind them, this ceaseless struggle increased. Nat would even take the wheel for a watch, in the hope that the exertion would tire him, drive his mind into an oblivion of rest. As the *Putnam* neared the bitter North Atlantic at the height of its stormy season, the men forward whispered that the navigator was losing his grip on things. They would reach the coast in December, and could expect days on days of gales and blinding snow. They well knew that constant, alert command could alone insure the *Putnam* against disaster.

As they neared the colder zone, Nat had finally forced himself to a pitch where he was making steady notes on *La Place*.

Chapter Twenty-One

I

TOWARD evening on Christmas Day, Prince decided to quit his library, and walk down by the waterfront to have a look at the harbor and the storm that was raging outside. It had been hard northeast weather now for several days, with snow and high winds. To Prince, the long-formed habit of going on deck in bad weather persisted now he was ashore in this counterpart of leaving the house for the silent wind-swept streets.

Once outside, his thoughts quickly formed with the habit of memory re-awakened into those of the quarter-deck and the helm. He bent under the icy blast as it struck down the street at him. It was better to be walking here ashore than to be lashed to a wave-swept heaving deck in weather like this.

His mind full of these abstractions, Prince stumbled down the obscured street with his head bent at an angle to dodge the sharp sting of hail. He could hear the murmur and faint roar of the surf from the bay. Naturally enough he fell to thinking of the *Putnam*, the voyage on which he had ventured nearly all his wealth. In another month she could be expected off the coast. It was hard to tell when she would arrive. Thank God she was not overdue now! To be awaiting her arrival in weather like this would be too taut a strain for his nerves.

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Prince reflected, and counted the days of the storm—three days so far of snow, with weeks of high wind and gales. He tightened his muffler about his throat. It had seemed so sure a thing when they had bought the *Putnam*, he and Gray, with Nat there to calculate the profits and prove the opportunity. But the months of the voyage had been months of anxiety.

He gained the shelter of the other side of the street and drove his feet more firmly into the drifted snow on the walk. He forced his mind—now growing numb with cold—to face his possible loss.

He could not meet it, that was all. There would not be cash enough left to continue life in his house, to wind up his years peacefully, a merchant venturing modest sums, carefully drinking the good Spanish wine.

His far train of thought was abruptly startled as he made out the figure of a man coming toward him through the thick snow. The figure almost passed him, head down, when Prince hailed it. As the figure slowly turned and straightened, Prince recognized William Gray.

Gray was trying to shout something to him, over the rim of his coat-collar, through the folds of his muffler. Prince could not understand anything but an invitation to come to Gray's house that evening. He nodded assent, and Gray's portly figure soon vanished noiselessly in the whirling snow.

For a while Prince kept on walking. Gray probably would have a fine hot toddy waiting when he got there, Prince decided, and a roaring fire. The more he thought of this, the less he was inclined to continue his walk along the harbor. You could not see halfway out the wharves except in the lulls between gusts. It would

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be better to get warm, and sample some of Gray's toddy.

A thought suddenly struck him. What in the world was Gray doing out on a night like this, in streets deserted and swept by a fierce gale?

Could there have been some report of the *Putnam*? No, that was absurd. Even if Nat had made such good time as to be off the coast now, he would never trust his position without a clear landfall.

Nevertheless, Prince turned, and directed his way now to Gray's house with quickening steps that made the snow creak beneath his feet.

Prince resolutely turned the corner and faced directly northeast, into the wind. For a few moments he resigned to battle with several heavy gusts that swept down out of the North River, then gained shelter on the far side of Washington Street.

He turned again, eastward on Essex Street, and faced the direct sweep of the wind down the long street. He shivered with the cold and the low state of his hopes. Nat—with Elizabeth giving every moment of rest an anguish—in command of the newly built *Putnam*, with his head filled with calculations and the distraction of his own work. Prince would not avoid thinking of the fate that would overtake the vessel if by any chance she should be off the coast now.

When he shook the snow from his coat on the Gray doorstep, and lifted the knocker, his face was drawn and lined. He wearily assented to William Gray's welcome, and walked with him to the fireside, where three hickory logs snapped and flickered up into the damp chimney their small blue flame.

For some time Prince's eyes rested heavily on the coals. He hesitated to speak of what was on his mind.

Navigator

Gray sat more forward on his tufted chair than Prince. His rounded body seemed ill at ease. Prince gradually became aware of his host's restless manner.

Gray called for some warm rum and lime juice.

"Come, Captain," said Gray, "take this toddy—it is made with English limes. It will warm you up. You look as though you'd had twenty-four hours on deck."

Prince accepted the glass silently, and sipped the aromatic yellow mixture.

Gray sighed and thrust his legs out before him. He sensed the focus of Prince's worry without asking. "After this venture, my dear Prince," he said, "my troubles will be over. I will not endure another uncertain voyage."

Prince glanced up from the glass in his fingers. "You mean the insurance company—you are planning to organize it finally?"

"Yes," replied Gray. "I have been reckless in waiting this long. If I have to borrow funds from Crown-inshield, I shall put it forward at the earliest moment. With sound underwriting, I think we can better the present rates, and still find an excellent investment."

Prince rolled a mouthful of the toddy against his cheek, relishing the slight astringent warmth, then swallowed. "Yes," he said at length, "you should do well. The rates have been so high, and owners willing to risk large sums without protection. I, for one, will gladly pay a tenth to be rid of worry such as this."

Raising his broad shoulders slightly, Prince turned more toward Gray. "Can you realize, Gray, what it would mean to lose your house, your wine, the chance to speculate from time to time on cargoes?" Prince shook his head bitterly. "To go to sea again as mate.

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To endure the food, and cold on such nights as these, with a storm slowly driving you level with the icy black water—" He passed his hand slowly over his eyes. "We are too old for that, having once known quarter-decks where masters were gentlemen. Do you realize now the rancid Madeira port that is served a commander? And the crews gathered from God knows where—talking gibberish aloft in answer to your commands? No, sir, by God, no, sir—I can't face that!"

Gray scanned his guest's face closely.

Prince suddenly clenched his hand. "What were you doing down by the harbor, sir?" he finally breathed out. "There cannot be a report of the *Putnam* offshore in weather like this! Bowditch would never dare it. Even if he trusted his piloting, he'd never trust his calculated position without a landfall." Prince's voice trailed off into silence as he watched Gray nod.

"Yes, there was a report. A very vague one to be sure. You didn't hear what I called to you?"

Prince's pale lips moved. "No—"

"Take it easy, Captain. I had no idea this voyage meant so much to you. All we know is that Mrs. Bowditch sent one of the neighbor's children in with some wild, incoherent story of having seen her husband. At least that's all I could make of it when the child came here a short while ago."

"Where is she—" muttered Prince, interrupting.

Gray glanced at the clock. "I've been expecting her. She sent word she would come. I had been trying to find her when I met you. I think it is just the hysteria of a captain's wife in a storm. You know, they're sometimes peculiar."

"What did the child say?" murmured Prince.

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"Just that Bowditch was in town, I tell you," replied Gray. "Come, Captain, you must have another toddy."

Prince rose, and restlessly paced the floor by the hearth. "Oh, be damned to putting your whole wealth into one vessel! A man's a fool to do it, I say. Whoever has sailed a craft should know better. A fool!"

A servant entered the room, and stopped at a distance from Gray's chair.

"Well?" Gray looked up sharply.

"It's Mrs. Bowditch, sah," announced the negro.

Prince and Gray exchanged rapid glances. Prince sank into his chair weakly. "Can you talk to her outside, Gray? Find out—exactly— I could not talk to her."

After a moment's hesitation, Gray left the room.

Alone, Prince shivered to think of what rested with Nat, torn as he was by the memory of Elizabeth—a madman in command of a vessel off a snow-beaten coast—in all probability facing forward into the storm, confident of the accuracy of his position. If he came out of it alive, reflected Prince, the humility of the wreck would be everlasting in Salem both to him and Nat. They would be a byword for all who were navigators. The rocks that dotted the coast far out to sea, the uncertain tides that set about them, these would make even that future of Nat's survival improbable, if the *Putnam* were offshore.

A log snapped in the fireplace, and turned Prince from his inward reflection. He heard the two voices in the hall—his host and Nat's wife—talking. As he listened, it seemed to him Mary's voice raised in pitch. It was truly excited in tone. At first he moved to rise

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from his chair, then a sudden hopeless lethargy held him.

The voices stopped, and Prince turned his head expectantly toward the wide doorway from the hall.

Gray's face bore an unnatural pallor.

Prince rose trembling from his chair. "There's not news?"

Gray nodded. He swallowed. "She says she has seen her husband to-night," he managed to say.

Prince forgot himself. "Seen him? Be damned! Speak out, man, will you? Is your tongue frozen?"

"Here in Salem—" Gray felt for a chair, and sat down, breathing heavily.

Prince started forward. "It has been thick snow for three whole days, sir. I tell you it's impossible!" He stood in front of Gray's chair, his head bent forward as though he were about to dive at him.

Gray drew a sharp breath. "Jefferson!" he called to the negro. "Will you show Mrs. Bowditch to the library?"

Both men waited, silent, afraid to speak further.

In a moment the wind-reddened features of Mary Bowditch appeared. She was dressed in a thick black dress, her young figure wrapped about with a heavy shawl of dark wool, which had become partly loosened from her shoulders when she had removed her coat, and trailed fantastically behind her. Seeing Prince, she started forward.

Halfway toward him she hesitated, overcome by the eager wild pressure in Prince's eyes.

She stopped and gathered the shawl about her shoulders carefully. With her free hand she arranged

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her hair which glistened with drops of water under her hat, where the snow had melted.

Without excuse she suddenly sank to her knees.

Prince strode forward and took her by the wrist with force.

"Is *he* here?"

Mary Bowditch shivered as though restraining a sob with difficulty. She nodded quickly in answer to Prince's final pressure.

"Then where is he? And the ship—where is the *Putnam*?"

"He's coming back—here—to this very house—directly—" she gasped incoherently.

Prince looked at Mary, incredulous, for a full minute. He suddenly dropped her hand, and listlessly walked toward the fire.

Mary remained where she sank on the floor, murmuring to herself, barely able to hold in the flood of tears that were behind her eyes, blind to every one in the room. She fondled a long woolen glove in her arms as though it were a baby, and crooned softly to it. Prince stared at the glove.

Gray coughed uncertainly. "It must be true," he said to Prince, who leaned against the mantel near the fire.

Prince shook his head. "She's out of her mind. She's mad!" His eyes returned slowly to the prostrate figure, slightly touched with compassion, almost the first show of feeling that had stirred in him.

Gray swung abruptly in his chair. "I don't know. He might have survived the wreck—if there has been one. At any rate—"

Prince nodded wearily. "Yes, she's had news. See,

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she has his glove there in her arms. Do you see? They brought that to her, they have found the body washed up somewhere."

With an uncertain movement, Gray half rose from his chair. "We'll hear shortly," he muttered. He rose finally, and walked toward Mary—where she sat clasping the glove to her breast, and rocking to and fro.

He glanced up at Prince in inquiry, as if to know what to do. He bent and stretched his hand out toward her.

Mary suddenly raised her face, alert, trembling, listening.

"He's coming now. I hear him! It's true he is here, he is alive!"

Both Gray and Prince heard the distinct dull tread of an approaching step on the porch outside. There was a silent pause, a knock, and then the door opened, and swung in. All three felt the chill draught of air across the floor.

Mary started toward the opening into the hall, sobbing now in earnest.

"Oh, my husband!" she cried, "I have prayed to the dear Lord Jesus that He send you back safely to me. I prayed! And He has answered my prayer."

II

After the trace of a moment passed Prince heard the front door close, and a familiar voice speaking.

"Yes, Mary, it is truly I, but really why are you crying? I simply was fortunate in having unusually good observations before the storm closed in. That and a fine compass served me."

Navigator

Nat glanced up as he saw the others in the room, and smiled toward them. Mary remained clinging about his knees with her arms.

"I presumed to enter, sir," he addressed Gray. "Your servant did not answer the first knock, and I had to reach you with the news."

"Tell us—" breathed Prince. He walked forward heavily, and placed both hands on Nat's frail shoulders, and looked deep into the weathered face, from whose lines Nat's eyes returned the gaze a trifle uncomfortably. "The ship—" Prince murmured faintly.

"Indeed," sighed Gray coming forward.

"The ship is safe," returned Nat briefly, "and her cargo and money intact. I have the invoices here." Nat held out a parcel wrapped in oilskin, which Gray absently placed on the table near him.

"You sailed straight into the Derby wharf?" repeated Prince, incredulous, "on a night like this?"

"Where is Jefferson?" growled Gray. "Jefferson! Toddy!"

"Come, come," said Nat slowly disengaging the arms of his wife, "you must realize that I am here." With a kiss, he tried to free Mary, who clung to him.

Nat remarked to Gray, "In with the invoices are some notes on La Place's '*Mécanique Céleste*.' I'd be obliged if you'd separate them when the time comes. I bundled all the papers together, in case—"

"My dear Bowditch," remonstrated Gray, "at such a time, at such a time to remember trivial matters! My God, sir, you've just brought the *Putnam* in!"

Mary leaned against Nat, pride shining from her face in the place of tears, and looked into his face deeply.

Prince fancied he saw a shadow fall over Nat's sharp

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features and hollowed cheeks. He passed off the notion—it meant nothing—the poor fellow was naturally exhausted from his long vigil in an ice-cold sea, with hours of straining eyes and worry behind him.

Jefferson arrived with the toddy. As he passed a glass to each person, the slight globules of steaming warmth congealed about the rim. They drank in silence.

Prince reached for the jug, and offered to fill Nat's glass again.

Nat coughed, and covered his mouth with his hand. In a moment he had cleared his throat.

He glanced down at his wife, at Gray, at the room—as though he were now for the first time actually noting the appearance of the objects around him.

To Prince, who now held out the second glass of toddy toward him, he smiled as he shook his head, and remarked with a double meaning and irony that touched his humor slightly, "I cannot exceed the certain quantity, you know."

Gray felt the constraint in the situation; he sensed dimly the unhappiness of Nat. His voice rose up from his round chest almost a trifle too loudly for the small distance that separated the two men.

"Certain quantity!" he cried heartily, picking up the phrase. "Come, Nat, my boy—drink!"

There was a comforting sureness in Gray's voice. It rang out with the certainty of fulfillment of Prince's prophecy that one day Nat would have the respect and confidence of every shipowner in Salem.

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After a time Nat persuaded his wife to leave. He would join her shortly at the house, and Gray and Prince were anxious to hear the details of the voyage and the business done. After she withdrew, Nat and Prince and Gray over their toddy talked of the voyage. Slowly Prince was adjusting himself to the fact that Nat was in Salem, and the *Putnam* made fast to the Derby wharf.

They fell to discussing the future.

"Shipowners from now on, Nat," murmured Gray, "cannot fail to have the highest regard for your judgment. You've proved your cause dramatically. And your position as the president of a marine insurance company would indeed be a fortunate one from which you can take advantage of this."

Prince joined in, and explained in more detail, the plans that were being formed.

"What do you think of this, Nat? As I see it, a good business can be built."

Nat turned in his chair toward the snow-darkened window.

To this young Bowditch of old Salem an extraordinary thing had come—success. That was it. He had won a game, a game whose importance hard-shelled shipowners would acknowledge and value.

A gracious answer to Gray's proposal became insistent as the minutes passed.

When Nat had mentioned the notes on the "*Méchanique Céleste*," Gray had said, "My dear Bowditch, why mention such trivial matters . . ." Yes, even

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after the most dramatic success, a man's spirit must still fall short of understanding by his fellow men.

Nat cut short his reverie, and took Gray's warm, large hand in his.

"You are all very kind, sir. Undoubtedly fine calculations will reduce the rates of insurance, and more owners insure with us. But—now—will you excuse me, sir, if I leave?"

Nat reached for the oilskin pouch that contained his papers.

Gray could not conceal his amazement.

"Surely, my dear Bowditch, you are not eager to be going out in this blizzard. Surely you have had enough, sir, of this violent weather!"

Nat shook his head, and reached for his coat and muffler. "I—I must be going—" he murmured apologetically.

Gray seemed to have presence of mind in the face of this unexpected behavior. "You'll have your answer in a few days?" he called after Nat.

Nat's assent floated back to him.

The door closed. "Eccentric fellow, eh, Prince? But able, very able."

Prince remained silent; his arm trembled on the mantel as he gazed down into the embers of the fire.

Prince alone sensed the wonder in Nat, the dream he had, the presence in him of the unknowable, the inscrutable. He felt this the more vividly in his reaction to concern about Nat, now the ship was safe . . .

Outside, Nat caught the soft dark swirl of snow against his face gratefully. He would walk out the Danvers road, on the way to the meadows, before he

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went home. He would stop for a while at Elizabeth's grave.

Then he would go on, his footfalls hushed by the deep soft snow. How beautiful the snow seemed! Soft, white, lovely. A beauty so far from the world. During a lull in the wind, a slight eddy of fine flakes seemed to form in the air about him. His heart warmed the blood in him at this friendly touch.

The forces that had come into this frail body of Nat Bowditch so many years ago in these meadows, the world that had given him his life to lead with such fierce intensity and conflict, had at last offered him achievement and, through that achievement, peace and a degree of understanding of his fellow-men.

A Note on Sources

Most of the incident and detail in this book has been founded on fact. While the complete bibliography would be inappropriate, perhaps a few of the main sources may be of interest.

On Nathaniel Bowditch there is N. I. Bowditch's excellent "Memoir of Nathaniel Bowditch" (Boston, 1839), originally a preface to Volume IV of the translation of "*Mécanique Céleste*." There is also a "Memoir of Nathaniel Bowditch" which includes an analysis of his scientific publications, by J. Pickering (Boston, 1838). "A Eulogy on the Life and Character of Nathaniel Bowditch," by Daniel Appleton White (Salem, 1838), and "A Discourse Upon the Life and Character of Nathaniel Bowditch," by the Rev. A. Young (Boston, 1838), complete the more dependable memoirs.

The Boston Public Library contains the library of Nathaniel Bowditch, about 7,500 volumes. There are about thirty volumes of manuscript, including the journals he kept of his voyages, and his "Notebook of Mathematiks" (written in 1788). The fine handwriting Bowditch achieved with the quill pen of the day and the yellowed paper, do not make for light reading, but the very minute and painstaking aspect of these pages makes a picture of the Navigator that rivals the famous Stuart portrait for its instant revelation.

For details of Salem in this period the somewhat unreliable, if encyclopædic, "Annals of Salem," by J. B. Felt (1803), offers a rich mine of detail. These pages are rivaled alone by the files of the *Salem Gazette*, which in both its editorial and advertising columns completely and authentically evokes the period. Finally, there is the great work of Samuel Eliot

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Morison, "Maritime History of Massachusetts" (Houghton-Mifflin, 1921), which stands far and away at the top of the list of readable and authentic writing on its subject.

Dr. Harold Bowditch has been tireless in his willing and generous assistance in locating material and genealogical data. Miss Alice Lerch of the New York Public Library and Mr. Frank Chase of the Boston Library allowed the author access to many valuable papers and books. Through the kindness of many others, the author has been enabled to reconstruct, with a degree of accuracy otherwise impossible, this story of a unique and intense figure.

